



Fast Car by **gameofboners**

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Summary: Ringo Wheeler loves her life. She loves her job at the local radio station, she loves the beat-up Beetle she drives and she certainly loves her boyfriend, Steve. But Hawkins has a history with monsters. And when they come back once again and threaten her lifestyle, she's forced to wield her axe and gather the gang to fight back once more. (Steve/OC) (Sequel to 'Slow Ride')

1. Surprise, Surprise

RINGO WHEELER liked to think that after eighteen years of existing she had finally learned how to get it right. She had mastered the art of finding friends that would always be there for her, made holding a steady and loving relationship look like a fine art and learned the importance of having a strong relationship with one's mother.

But driving? Well, Ringo Wheeler was about to make that her bitch.

She pointedly kept her eyes forward on the road, never daring to glance sideways at the driving tester in case the scribbles he was writing on the record sheet *wasn't* a series of stars and hearts alongside the margin of the page. The tester, who of all names was called Judas, looked iffy the second he settled into her banged up yellow bug. Ringo would have taken offence to his upturned nose and stiff posture, had he not held the power of providing her with a licence. Her 1969 Volkswagen Beetle was her baby, even if it did emit a very worrying rattle every time it was turned on.

"Take the next left," Judas instructed, pointing with his pen towards the nearest turn. Switching her indicators on and flipping her hair so he could *clearly* see she was checking her mirrors, Ringo proudly made the turn. Scribbles be damned, this was some of the best driving she had done in her life.

Turning the corner allowed her to see a group of teenagers that were flocked together ahead, lazily walking down the street as they had just exited the movie theatre. Ringo beamed at the dark curly head of her cousin, who had grown exponentially taller in the last few months. Even taller than her now - much to herself and Nancy's chagrin. Completely forgetting her current situation, she started to thump her palm against the steering wheel, waving excitedly at the group who awkwardly waved back.

"Hey losers!" She shouted through her open window, eyes darting back and forth between them and the road ahead.

"Isn't Ringo doing her driving test today?" Lucas muttered, dropping his hand when she was out of sight.

"Yep," Mike sighed, having a strong sense his cousin wouldn't be passing after that display. It was a true shame, he really wanted another chauffeur to drive him around while Nancy was still in the process of learning.

"Yeah, she's not passing," Lucas scoffed, dipping his hand back into the box of popcorn he had kept with him since the theatre.

"Not a chance in hell," Mike agreed.

As Ringo turned back to face the road again, she felt eyes burning into the side of her face that told her Judas was *very* unimpressed with her little display. Awkwardly swallowing, she turned the wheel to pull into the parking lot as Judas instructed.

Pulling the car into park, Ringo's hand shakily twitched through her blonde hair, hoping she hadn't managed to screw herself entirely. Steve had spent too many Saturdays screaming in her passenger seat for her to let him and herself down now. Even her uncle Ted had tried to teach her once - that lasted all but ten minutes before he told her to let him out on the side of the road and never drive again.

"Alright, Ringo Wheeler," Judas started, huffing a little as he flicked through the sheets in front of him. His lips were pursed, expression entirely unreadable.

"Yeah?" She squeaked, gnawing on her lower lip nervously. Ringo wasn't the most religious person, but she found herself praying at that moment. Praying that she'd pass and that Judas wasn't about to betray her like he had Jesus Christ.

"This car is a death trap, and you're one of the most nervous drivers I've experienced in my fourteen years of testing," Judas began, settling the papers in his lap and turning to face her.

Ringo grimaced, her mind thinking up every comment she could use against him - how she didn't 'need' to drive when she had public transport and a boyfriend that she could beg for a ride from, how his mother had named him Judas for a reason and how his hairline wouldn't have receded so far back if he had been a nicer person. And then, he spoke again.

"Against my better judgement, my *strong, strong* willed better judgement, I'm going to pass you based on today's performance," he finished, visibly eye rolling when she jumped up with a grin, "you'll receive your licence in the mail within two weeks, I wish you good luck. You'll need it."

Ringo restrained herself from excitedly jumping up and down and hollering with happiness - she would do that once he got out of the car.

Judas handed her a temporary driving permit, before opening the door and stepping out to return to the test centre. She was on the verge of shouting in celebration, until he kept the door open instead of slamming it so he could look back inside.

"And for god's sake, get that engine rattle checked out will you?" He looked at the car with disgust once again, slamming the door after one final comment. "If your driving doesn't kill someone, the car sure will."

Ringo ignored his remarks until he was out of sight, an excited grin remaining on her face as she slapped her hands against the wheel before fist-pumping the air. She was on top of the world, and Judas Iscariot wasn't going to bring her off that pedestal now.

Shoving her Joy Division cassette tape into the tape deck, Ringo beamed somehow even wider when *Love Will Tear Us Apart* began to blare through her speakers. Putting the car into drive, she pulled out of the parking lot with the windows down, the warm summer air shifting through her hair.

Steve was at work until six today, but this news couldn't wait until he had taken off his blue and white striped hat and apron. Besides, she could sure do with a serving of their bubblegum flavour ice cream.

"For god's sake Harrington," Phil cursed into the teenager's ear pointing angrily at the shape of the scoops he was tugging out of the ice cream cartons on display. "You're giving out ice cream, not digging for China."

"Yep," Steve replied shortly, knowing it was better to shrug Phil's remarks off than give into them. He had started working at *Scoops Ahoy!* ice cream parlour a month ago, just after his high school career had ended on an all time high. He often wondered if the horror of working there was penance for piquing too early in life. In truth, it wouldn't have been *that* bad if somehow his manager Phil and every teenager in Hawkins decided to suddenly vanish off the face of the Earth.

"Yeah, *Harrington*," Robin muttered when Phil disappeared out the back, an amused grin twisting up her lips. The two were often stuck together during shifts, unluckily for the both of them. Steve found Robin to be helplessly annoying who tried too hard to be funny, while Robin considered Steve to be one of the biggest airheads to ever be born in Indiana.

"Oh, shut up," he rolled his eyes, sliding the misshapen scoop of pistachio ice cream onto a cone before handing it towards the impatient thirteen year old that was watching him like a hawk.

"I sincerely pity your girlfriend with those loose wrists," she teased, thoroughly enjoying pushing on his buttons.

"At least I *have* a girlfriend," he fired back, taking off the single-use plastic gloves and tossing them into the trash. "You haven't found anyone who can stand you enough to date you."

"It's slim pickings in Hawkins," Robin scoffed, starting to wipe down the counter with a damp cloth. "By all means, if you know any single women who prefer the company of other single women, let me know."

"As a matter of fact I do, but I wouldn't put her through the agony of introducing you two."

"Har har," she rolled her eyes, scrubbing at a dark spot of dirt on the white counter top. "If she's friends with you, she's clearly not worth my time of day."

Steve noticed another body appear in the entrance to the parlour from the corner of his eye, sighing and preparing for another rude

customer, he was pleasantly surprised to see his girlfriend instead.

"Hey, you!" He called out, ignoring Robin scoffing again - this time at the goofy grin he wore at the sight of his girlfriend.

"Hi," she beamed in return, her happy mood only increasing exponentially at the sight of him.

"I loved you on the radio last night," Steve commented, rounding around the till so he could meet her upfront, while anxiously glancing back at the store room door for Phil's reappearance.

"I told you that you didn't have to stay up and listen to me," she hummed, lifting her chin up as he pressed a welcoming peck to her cheek. "I'm fully aware the only people listening to the radio at 1am are insomniacs."

Contrasting with Steve, Ringo *loved* her new employment with the local radio station, Hawkins FM. Music was her passion, and she was more than ecstatic to be given her own hour to play and discuss what ever she wanted - even if it meant it was the 1am slot. The show was thus named '*Radio Ringo*', and even though many people turned it off after realising it wasn't an hour filled with Beatles songs, she was more than happy with her current position.

"I don't mind staying up late to listen to your voice, I barely get to hear it at all lately," he quirked his eyebrows cheesily. "Which reminds me, how badly did you fail your driving test?"

"Hey!" She smacked his bicep, narrowing her eyes at his comment but still unable to wipe the smile off her face. "I'll have you know, I passed it! I'll be personally faxing each and every single person who said I can't drive a copy of my temporary licence."

"What? Was he high?" Steve recoiled, genuinely shocked. At the sight of her rising frown, he leaned in to cup her cheeks and press a kiss to her lips. "I'm kidding, babe. I'm so proud of you!"

"Ringo Wheeler!" A voice bellowed from behind, prompting Steve to jump back from her in fear. "Aren't you banned from entering these premises?"

"I don't think you have the authority to ban me, *Phil*," she retorted, rolling her eyes at his remark and the finger pointed in her direction.

"Oh don't I?" He asked, pointing towards a very *new* sign displayed on the wall beside him that wrote, in overly large black writing, 'MANAGEMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REFUSE ENTRY'.

"Well," Ringo conceded, choosing to hold her purse up for him to see, "I'm looking to buy an ice cream. Are you going to refuse money?"

"Fine," Phil grumbled after a moment of thought, "but you're getting out straight after purchase. And I'll be *standing* here to make sure you do, I don't want no frolicking with Steve here."

Her boyfriend's eyes were wide as he dipped underneath the display to get her what he already knew she'd order.

"Oh yes," Ringo drily spoke in return, "because *nothing* turns me on more than ice cream and the sight of you watching us."

"This is why you're banned," Phil shouted back, having had enough of her remarks while his two employees tried to hide their rising laughs.

"That'll be \$1.40," Robin prompted from the till, lips curled in to prevent from laughing.

"You know, Phil? I just passed my driving test, maybe this could be your present to me," she chanced, fishing for the correct change anyway from her purse.

"You're not getting it free, pay Robin and then get out," he shook his head, having had enough of her antics as he returned to the store room with a particularly peeved expression.

"He likes me deep down, I think," Ringo commented to Robin as she handed over the change, dropping a wink to Steve when he slipped the cone into her waiting hand.

"Are we still on for tonight?" He called out as she began to walk towards the exit.

"Definitely," Ringo nodded, blowing a playful kiss at him. It was

overly cheesy and very uncharacteristic of her to do, but there was nothing killing her mood today. "I'll pick *you* up."

"Make sure to bring flowers," he responded, raising the pitch of his voice to sound feminine, "for my grave! When you end up hitting a wall!"

Ringo stuck up her middle finger in reply, eliciting a tinkling laugh from Robin as she exited the store. Now she only had tonight to look forward to.

Tomorrow was Steve's nineteenth birthday, and while he was under the impression they'd be sharing a romantic dinner, Ringo was planning one hell of a party for him at his house.

"I'm home!" Ringo called out, her voice ringing through the apartment that now held, as of yesterday, a new occupant.

"Oh honey," Julia walked out into the hallway to meet her, a pitiful expression on her face, "you can always take the test again."

"I didn't fail the test, for crying out loud," she rolled her eyes - did people really have that little faith in her?

"Really?" Julia frowned, as if the news was *that* shocking. Once she saw Ringo's deadpan gaze, she quickly recovered and wore a bright smile. "Kidding, of course! I'm delighted for you, honey."

Ringo reluctantly accepted her hug, suddenly beginning to doubt her driving skills now that every single person she knew had doubted her too. After pulling away, Julia called out to the younger girl in the living room, who was propped on the couch watching their TV.

"Hear that, Sunny?" Julia greeted, trying her best to adopt a warm grin. "Ringo passed her driving test!"

Sunny was the newest member of the Wheeler clan, although only temporary. Julia had gotten rather obsessed with fostering after seeing a heartbreaking advert during one of *Cheer's* commercial breaks. After a lengthy process that spawned half a year, she was finally applicable to foster a child - and thus, Sunny had arrived.

Ringo hadn't heard her speak once since she moved in, although it had only been a measly twenty-four hours, so she tried to put it down to nerves. She had never seen her mother act so polite to another person, where Julia had only ever been sarcastic and teasing with her actual daughter.

The fostered child looked over with a blank expression at the two of them, paused for a beat, and then finally turned back to face the TV. Julia let out a sigh of frustration, leaning in to murmur in Ringo's ear.

"What if she doesn't *speak* English, Ringo?" Julia questioned worriedly, "her parents are South Korean but the case worker never mentioned she wouldn't understand us."

"I'm from fucking Michigan," the girl finally spoke with an extremely clear American accent, shocking the two out of their stare as she fixed them with a harsh glare. Ringo and Julia jumped in place, nodding and politely smiling in apology before jetting off to the kitchen, their eyes wide with embarrassment.

Ringo had never felt like she was the stereotypical boyfriend in her relationship until that current moment, and she was loving every bit of it. Pulling into the mall's parking lot, she honked the horn to capture Steve's attention as he was propped up against the wall, patiently waiting. His head snapped up at the sound, eyes drawn to the horrifically bright Volkswagen she refused to part with as he trudged his way towards it.

Ringo had the window rolled down all the way, her arm hanging lazily out of it as she smirked at her incoming boyfriend.

"Hey sweet thing," she called out, exaggeratedly looking him up and down. "Need a ride?"

"Shut up," he closed his eyes at her ridiculousness, although a chuckle still fell from his lips as he rounded the car and climbed inside the passenger seat.

"So I'm guessing we're going back to your place first to change?"

"I never thought I'd hate ice cream," Steve ranted, feeling as if he was crawling inside his work uniform. "But if I hear 'Rocky Road' one more time today I'm telling Jane to explode my brain inside my head."

"You wouldn't need Jane to do it, Max would beat you up for free," Ringo snickered, keeping her eyes on the road to prove her driving skills to Steve and ease his consciousness.

"Did you hear Billy got a job at the swimming pool as a lifeguard?"

"A *lifeguard*," Ringo scoffed, "Billy Hargrove would let me drown and then give my body for kids to use as a float."

After a short period of driving, they reached Steve's house. Ringo struggled to keep the smirk off her face, knowing well that all of their friends were hiding behind the door to jump up and surprise him. She frowned upon noticing the lights in the house were all on, knowing the group had been given strict instructions to keep them off. She could only hope they had the sense to hide.

"Did I forget to switch the lights off?" Steve pondered, unbuckling his belt as Ringo pulled in to park. He waited next to the car for her to get out as well, so they could walk side by side up to the door.

"What time is the reservation?" He asked suddenly.

"Eight," she responded, weary of his curiosity, "why?"

"So we have an hour for some fun?" He snickered into her ear, resting his arm around her shoulders. Ringo simply rolled her eyes and shoved his arm off in response. Ever since they had finally bridged the gap and moved to the 'next step', Steve liked to use every opportunity he could to seduce her.

While Steve fumbled with his keys, she bit her lip, hardly able to contain her excitement. Ringo cowered behind Steve to hide her elation, not wanting to ruin the surprise at the last minute.

As Steve finally opened the front door after what felt like hours, she jumped up, ready to scream along with their friends 'happy birthday'. To say that she was particularly pissed off to see that not only were

her friends in plain sight, but not even looking towards Steve, was an understatement.

"What the hell?" Steve called out, catching their attention. Nancy's eyes were wide, staring at Ringo over Steve's shoulder almost in warning. Narrowing her eyes in confusion, the couple moved forward further to investigate.

"You guys threw a party for me?" Steve asked, a cheesy grin on his face. But that grin soon faded when the person who everyone's eyes were fixed on instead of him finally revealed themselves from around the corner.

Ringo looked over curiously when she felt Steve stiffen beside her, following his eye-line to see a rather tall and poised woman, no older than mid forties. She was impeccably dressed, not a hair out of place. But her appearance was greatly marred by the frown she was giving the two.

"Mom?" Steve breathed out, eyebrows furrowing. "I thought you wouldn't be back until next week."

"I thought I'd come home early," she smiled falsely, giving Ringo a quick once over. "And who might this be?"

We are finally back and in action! I hope everyone enjoys this book and what's to come!

2. Beverly Hills Cop

"**SHE'S A REAL** barrel of laughs, isn't she?" Jonathan forced a laugh, his arm slung around Nancy's shoulder as the party attendants dispersed down Steve's driveway to return to their respective cars.

The group had been promptly kicked out after Steve and Ringo arrived, and while most were bummed out by the cancellation of a party, Ringo Wheeler was more than troubled by the appearance of Steve's mother.

Despite Steve knowing Ringo's own mother enough to almost call her a friend, she had never met Steve's parents. She didn't particularly long to, never having been in a serious relationship to know how to approach *that* situation. But Steve's reluctance to allow their meeting gave her pause.

"She's a bitch," Jessica drily commented, ignoring the wide eyes her friends threw her as a result of her vulgarity. They didn't move to deny it either, though.

"She didn't seem to like me anyway," Ringo chuckled, although her tone immediately set her friends off about the mood she was in. Glancing toward her, they didn't fail to notice the slump in her shoulders and downturned set of her lips.

"*Hey*," Jessica hummed as she wrapped her own arm around Ringo to comfort the blonde, walking side by side towards her Beetle. "Mothers never like their son's girlfriends, and I personally think there'd be a problem if someone like that approved of you."

Nancy stayed pointedly quiet, expressing herself through the sympathetic gaze she was giving her cousin. Ringo nodded towards her, eyebrows furrowed with curiosity.

"Did you two ever meet? What did she think of you?"

"Ah yes," Jonathan sighed dramatically, giving a short eye roll. "I love being reminded that my girlfriend used to date my friend."

Nancy giggled at his reaction, playfully slapping his arm with the back of her hand before returning her attention to Ringo, a grimace consuming the amusement.

"Well... she didn't *hate* me, but I'm sure she doesn't hate you either! She's probably just pissed about the party!" Nancy's words were intended to be a source of reassurance for her cousin, but Ringo could tell Nancy's behaviour enough by now to know that she was lying. Mrs Harrington probably *adored* Nancy the first time that they met.

"Don't listen to her," Jessica scoffed, guessing that her friend wouldn't feel any better after Nancy's cryptic revelation. "Fancy Nancy over here probably baked the bitch a goddamn cake, '*thanks for letting me date your son!*'"

Ringo couldn't help but laugh at Jessica's jibe, and gained even further amusement from Nancy's middle finger that was now poised in the air towards her friend. But her inner insecurities still hung over her head like a dark cloud. Subconsciously, Ringo flicked the ends of her hair and looked down the length her body to make sure nothing looked out of place. She had already made a bad enough first impression as it was.

Robin drearily tapped her fingers against the side of the register, her eyes fixed on the clock hung above the entrance. Some say a watched kettle never boils, and in her case, a watched clock takes twice the time to tick.

It may have only been the start of Summer, but the weather had been rather dreadful for a casual day in June. The skies were dark, and the rain ploughed against roofs and pavements. It was most certainly not a day for ice cream.

The sight of a figure entering through the door caused her to stand up straight, almost excited at the prospect of having *something* to do. With Steve receiving the day off and therefore absent from being the object of her teasing, the hours were ticking by mercilessly. Not even Phil had bothered to come in to make sure the shop was running smoothly.

A teenage girl, who Robin didn't recognise immediately, stepped toward the till with a blank expression. Instead of looking toward the ice creams on offer, she was staring pointedly at Robin.

"Can I.. help you?" Robin offered, shrinking inward from the speculative stare the girl was giving her. Her eyes snapped up to the door upon hearing a throat clear from the outside, a sound that prompted the girl to roll her eyes in frustration.

"Ringo wants to know is Phil here?" She asked finally, crossing her arms over her chest. Sunny had about enough of Ringo's antics, already. Chuckling lowly, Robin shook her head and watched in amusement as the teenager turned back to call out to her cowering foster sister. "He's not here! So hurry up because you've got the money!"

Ringo popped her head around the corner, a wide grin suddenly overwhelming her face before she began to tip toe toward the counter. Despite hearing that the Devil wasn't there to send her packing, she was still cautious. Her grin faltered slightly upon noticing that Phil wasn't the only employee absent today.

"Hi Robin," she waved, feeling a swell of disappointment. It was Steve's birthday, and she had hoped to surprise him at work. Going to his house to do at this point so could have meant certain death. "Where's Steve?"

"Hi Ringo," the cashier waved in return, beaming at the girl politely. "He's not here, Phil said not to bother coming in because the place would be empty today. Apparently it's his birthday, so Steve was given the day off instead of me."

Masking her disappointment, a quick glance over the girl behind the register gave Ringo a 'lightbulb' moment. She only ever saw Robin around school once or twice, and even then the blonde was regularly alone, her nose stuck in a book or absent altogether. A sucker for making friends with the ones who strayed from the popular spectrum, Ringo saw another one of her group's victims right before her eyes.

"We're throwing a little thing at Brainshakes later on," she tilted her

head, lips lifting in what she hoped looked like a friendly grin. "Wanna come? My friends are fucking weird, but there's cake and a free jukebox so!"

"I don't think Steve would want me there," she visibly grimaced, before plastering a mischievous smirk across her lips, "so with that in mind, I'll definitely be there!"

"Are you going to take my order?" Sunny prompted after a moment of silence, arms crossed over her chest. Her attitude was certainly intimidating, enough to spur Robin to quickly fetch her order at near lightning speed. But Ringo suspected there was a lot more going on under the teenager's cool exterior than she let on.

The blonde had her fair share of family problems in the past, but she would never and could never draw a relation between her history and Sunny's. She would never know what it was like to be in the system, all she could do was hope that being around their small family would help her come out of her shell.

A knock at the front door sounded throughout the apartment, just as Ringo had lifted their phone to dial Steve's number. She still hadn't gotten the chance to talk to him since last night, and felt a little foolish for planning party preparations without assuring the subject of their celebrations would even be free.

"Ringo, get the door!" Julia's voice followed, muffled through the walls. The girl sighed heavily, setting the phone down once more and trudging towards the door.

"Why can't you get it?" She asked, potentially loud enough for their visitor to hear.

"If it's Karen, tell her I'm dead," she appeared in the hallway suddenly, frantically pointing at the door and speaking with a hushed voice. "She's trying to get me to go down to the public pool to check out the lifeguards. First of all, I'm not a cougar. Second of all, you were a ten-pound baby. I'll never be bikini-body ready for the rest of my days."

"Ten pounds?" Ringo echoed in horror, eyes wide as she reached for the deadbolt. "What the fuck were you *eating*?"

Her expression went through a series of transformations then - from horrified at her mother's revelation, to a friendly grin she adopted for most strangers and then finally to surprise when she saw it was the very person she was about to call.

"Steve?" She stepped back, allowing him to enter and lifting her head to receive the welcoming kiss he planted on her cheek.

"I needed to get out of the house, my mom's going through a guilty phase and she's all over me," his eyes were wide as he spoke, nervously fiddling with his jacket and tucking his hair back.

"Happy Birthday!" Ringo exclaimed, rolling onto her tip toes to press a kiss to his lips. He made an attempt to deepen it, but she quickly halted his efforts with a warning smack on his bicep. Her mother would have their heads if they 're-enacted a porno' again.

"Who's that?" Sunny's voice met her ears, the two turning around to greet the smaller girl standing behind them. Steve kept one arm wound around Ringo's waist, waving towards her new foster sister.

"Hey! You must be Sunny, I'm Steve," he greeted, his voice audibly forced to appear as cheerful as possible. Her boyfriend and friends were a little over-excited at the prospect of Julia fostering a child, desperate to meet her but also fearful of scaring her off.

Two days living with her told Ringo that even a demogorgan wouldn't have scared Sunny off. In fact, she'd probably look it square in the eye and tell it to 'get fucked'.

"Yeah, I'm Sunny! Nice to meet you!" She beamed up at the tall man, holding her hand out for him to shake. Ringo's eyes narrowed at her complete shift in mood, never having even seen her smirk before now.

With one final smile, Steve was dragged to Ringo's bedroom by his girlfriend herself, who was shaking her head in disbelief for the entirety of the short journey.

"I bought that girl a teddy bear *and* an ice-cream, she didn't even blink and all you have to do is *smile*?" She huffed, shutting the bedroom door after he entered to ensure no eavesdroppers were listening. Steve plopped down on her bed with a smirk, casually shrugging with a cocky edge to it.

"Ladies of all ages love me, what can I say?" He commented, eyes following her as she moved to sit next to him, curling her legs up underneath her.

"How does it feel being nineteen, womaniser?" She hummed in amusement, tucking her blonde hair behind her ear and back from her face.

"Weird," Steve sighed, falling down to lay flat on his back and stare at the glow in the dark stickers of stars and planets Ringo had plastered around the ceiling. "I feel like I'm too young to be an adult, but too old to be a teenager. You get me?"

"No," she smirked, "I'm eighteen, old man. Can't relate."

"If I was an old man, Julia would have had me thrown out of a window by now," he chuckled as he clasped his hands over his stomach. "Speaking of moms... I'm sorry I didn't tell mine about you. There honestly wasn't anything behind it."

"No, no," Ringo shook her head, avoiding the eyes that had suddenly turned to her. "It's alright. I don't mind at all."

If adults still forced people of her age to stick out their tongue to judge its colour and somehow relate it to the level of truth in their words - Ringo's tongue would be black as coal. Lying wasn't an act she often liked to commit with Steve, but eight months of a relationship had taught her that little white lies often helped a relationship function.

She *did* mind that he hadn't told his mother they were dating after eight months. Especially when he had dated Nancy for around the same period of time, and her cousin had met Mrs Harrington on multiple occasions. Insecurities latched onto her mind like leeches, but she also was aware of how Steve longed for a steady relationship

with his mother. If she was finally trying to make an effort with her son, Ringo wasn't going to cause drama that would affect that and simultaneously ruin his birthday.

"I'm just pissed I missed out on the party," he groaned, clapping a hand over his forehead. "You went to so much trouble."

"Well then bring your ass to Brainshakes tonight because I've only gone and done it again," she waggled her eyebrows suggestively at him, eliciting a loud laugh at her expression. "I even got a new cake. I won't lie, my mom and I made it because I couldn't get to the bakery in time. But you're going to pretend to like it anyway because if you don't I'll dump you."

"You've been threatening to dump me since we started dating," he snickered, leaning up onto his elbows until their faces were closer together. "I'm starting to think you're bluffing."

Their lips soon met thereafter, silencing Ringo's protests and effectively continuing what they had started in the hallway. But as usual, Julia Wheeler used the sixth sense she seemed to possess over her daughter's relationship to burst open the door without knocking.

They were both fully clothed, bodies not even touching as they shared a kiss, but the duo still flung apart as if they had been shocked, in fear of her wrath.

"What's this then?" She eyed them dramatically, "an *orgy*?!"

"It's Steve's birthday, Mom!" Ringo squealed happily, hoping the subject would distract her as she pinched his cheeks.

"Is that a present you were giving him?" She raised an eyebrow cheekily, heading towards the small trash can in the corner of Ringo's room. No matter how much she demanded, her daughter still had a nasty habit of leaving it untouched until it was overflowing with empty candy wrappers.

"How many times, Ringo?" She sighed, reaching down for the sides of the plastic bag holding her trash to remove it. Steve and Ringo watched her movements casually, until a sudden epiphany overcame

the blonde, causing her to freeze up.

Ringo suddenly began to beat on her boyfriend's arm frantically, eyes widening further and further as she noticed her mother had paused all of a sudden, tilting her head in suspicion.

"Go, now!" She whispered to him, unable to tear her eyes away from the disaster that was about to unfold. Steve stupidly stayed put, confused by her sudden mood change as Julia lifted a stray pencil from the nearby desk and bent down to lift something up with it.

It was as if time had slowed to a crawl, everything moving in slow-motion as if it were a movie playing before her very eyes. But this was a horror. A blood curdling, terror-filled flick that instilled fear in every girl and boy still living under their parents roof. Except instead of an alien exploding from her mother's chest when she turned around, she was simply holding a pencil. A pencil that now had a used condom draped over it.

There was a brief moment of pause before Ringo and Steve literally leaped from the bed, scrambling to escape her bedroom and sprint down the hallway before Julia could even speak. The blonde felt as if they were in a cartoon, their legs becoming a blur underneath them from the speed with which they ran towards the front door. Like in Scooby Doo, when Daphne and Fred would run from a monster.

Except that monster was her mother, who was now holding proof that not only had they engaged in sexual activities - but they had done so in *her* home.

"I'll be back before curfew!" Ringo cried out, before Steve ripped her through the front door and down the hallway of their apartment building, the door falling closed behind them.

She could only hope that Nancy would let her borrow an outfit for tonight - for she wasn't coming home for a few hours at least.

They didn't speak again until they were safely inside Steve's car, their hair wild and their breathing erratic. Even then, the only thing they could bring themselves to do when their eyes met over the centre was to explode into laughter.

"KISS?" Jessica's sudden voice startled the new girl with the short hair, enough to jump on the spot and look up with a gasp. When she saw that the perpetrator was looking at her with a friendly expression, Robin's heart rate began to calm down, even chuckling at herself. She was always the worst for jumpscares.

"Sorry, what?" She replied dumbly, confused for a second. Robin may have stayed clear of cliques in high school, but even she had heard of Jessica's nickname through the grapevine - '*Jessbian*.' She was the last person to judge, but she didn't expect her to be so forward.

"KISS!" Jessica tried to explain, gesturing towards the jukebox where the blonde had just selected a new song to come on. "The band!"

"Oh!" She placed her hand over her chest apologetically, feeling stupid all of a sudden. She was the one who had just punched in the number for 'I Was Made For Lovin' You', one would think she'd have copped onto the comment earlier. "Sorry! But yeah, KISS. They're one of my favourites."

"Good choice," Jessica smiled warmly, giving her a nod before spinning back around to rejoin Jonathan Byers in the nearest booth. Against her will, her cheeks began to blush red from the interaction. She'd be a liar if she didn't admit to once having a crush on Jessica back in Sophomore year. While she struggled with coming to terms with her sexuality, she longed for the laid back attitude Jessica had adopted to the whole thing. She didn't care what people thought; Robin admired that.

A sudden array of hollers and cheers prompted her to turn around, seeing Steve and Ringo finally arrive through the entrance. The former of the two looked around in wonder at the fairy lights decorating the place - which were courtesy of Joyce Byers, of course.

Their group of friends were all present, as well as a few familiar faces from school. Tommy and Billy were excluded, for obvious reasons as a result of fatal douchebag syndrome.

Nancy suddenly appeared from the kitchen, carrying a large but somewhat lopsided homemade cake that messily scrawled '*Happy*

Birthday Steve' in icing on top. A chorus of the happy birthday song soon rang out, and even Robin found herself singing along after a moment.

Steve looked bashful at that moment with all eyes on him, scanning the room before eventually landing his gaze on his girlfriend beside him. Ringo wrapped her arm around his waist comfortably, singing along off-key and beaming brightly. The cake finally neared him, and thus it came the time to make a wish and blow out the candles.

In that moment, surrounded by his friends and the woman he loved - Steve wished for nothing more than for it to last forever.

Another cheer sounded out as he extinguished the mini flames with a single huff of breath, Nancy then passing the cake into Ringo's hands for her to cut into slices for everyone.

"What'd you wish for?" She asked over the sound of hollering, looking up with interest as she slid the cake onto the counter top until she could find a knife to cut it.

"For money," he raised his eyebrows, elaborating when she gave him a confused glance, "money to pay for your boob job, of course."

Ringo wasn't offended, they were a couple who playfully insulted more than they complimented each other. But she also didn't think he could get away with it because it was his birthday.

Slipping her palm underneath the cake itself so she wouldn't end up smashing a plate, she whipped around and smashed its contents into his face, coating him with sponge, cream and icing. The party attendants laughed at the sight, as Steve took a minute to lick the cake surrounding his mouth and use his fingers to rub it from his eyes.

"Well," he began, his sudden smile looking ridiculous with his coated face as he scraped the cake off into his hands, "thank god I didn't eat it!"

Without warning he grabbed onto his girlfriend, dragging her into his chest and smearing the cake in his hands into her hair. She squealed

in protest, flailing to get away from him but her efforts were futile. Eventually she succumbed to his attack, sighing as he began to rub his cheeks and chin against the top of her forehead.

"Are they always like this?" Robin asked Jessica, bravely moving to sit across from her in the booth after a full five minutes of convincing herself to do it.

"Yeah," Jessica grinned fondly, "they're fucking disgusting."

"You're not getting your present!" Ringo cried out to get him to stop, her comment having immediate effect as he dropped his arms, laughing as he moved to wipe off his face with a napkin from the nearest dispenser.

"You have to give it to me," he pouted like a child, "what if your mother kills you and it's my last memory of you?"

With a sigh, Ringo rounded the corner of the counter and fetched a large, carefully wrapped cardboard cylinder that had thankfully evaded their mini-food fight. Tossing it toward him, his eyes were bright as he ripped off the red ribbon and tore through the packaging. Peering through the cylinder, his eyebrow cocked at what he guessed was some sort of poster.

Gesturing for Ringo to grab the end of it so he could tug it out, Steve pulled the poster out and carefully unravelled it to see it completely. He was already smiling from the first few inches of it that he saw, the title *Beverly Hills Cop* - otherwise known as his new favourite movie of all time, staring back at him.

A black scrawl disrupted the mint condition of the poster, garnering his attention until he nearly dropped the whole thing in shock. It was an autograph and therefore barely legible, but he could still make out the massive 'E' and 'M'.

"No!" He exclaimed, whipping around with an agape mouth towards the one who had gifted him with it. "You did *not* get Eddie Murphy's signature!"

"I have contacts," she shrugged with a smirk, giggling when he rushed

forward and lifted her off her feet in a hug. Steve spun her for a second before setting her back down, kissing her cheek in gratitude before racing towards the rest of the basketball team to fawn over the present.

With a coy smile, Ringo moved to join her cousin at the counter as she casually sipped on a Strawberry milkshake, watching as Steve animatedly pointed at the black writing.

"I can't believe you made me sign it," Nancy raised an eyebrow smartly, shaking her head in disbelief.

"But look how happy he is," Ringo refuted, watching fondly as he happily flitted around the rest of the party's attendants before eventually making his way back to her.

So overwhelmed that people are already reading the sequel! Thanks so much to everyone who has continued on from Slow Ride to see Steve and Ringo's story continue, it means the world!

RedVelvetPanPan - Hello again! So happy to see your name once more! x

Guest - Ahhh thank you so much! I'm so glad you think I do the show justice, it's such a compliment you have no idea!

TacoPhoenix - Thank you! I hope Fast Car lives up to your expectations and I'm so glad you enjoyed Slow Ride! Definitely Sunny will become more involved, don't judge her too quick! I had to continue this book because I feel like I have so much more to give Ringo as a character, and her relationship with Steve's family is one part of it! And as for Robin and Jessica, well ;) x

Eunli - So happy to hear that!

candy95 - Hello again! I've missed writing this book so much, it's really a happy place for me to turn to. I don't wanna give too much away but I will say that Jessica will be getting a girlfriend that's worthy of her in this book ;) hope you liked this chapter!

3. Burnouts and Insomniacs

"WELL MY LITTLE BURNOUTS AND INSOMNIACS," Ringo spoke clearly into her microphone, smirking at her own comment as she simultaneously prepared the next record to play, "that was 'Video Killed the Radio Star' by The Buggles, being very ironically played on the radio. Trying to keep the tunes as upbeat as possible for one thirty in the morning, before I fall asleep on the decks - so next up is 'Relax' by Frankie Goes to Hollywood!"

Clicking off the switch that played sound from her mic, the blonde turned the volume up on the track currently playing before leaning back in her chair. Tiredly, her eyes flicked to the clock on the wall, just above the soundproof door. The hour droned by, and she longed to be at home in her bed.

Without doubt, Ringo Wheeler loved her job at the radio station. From starting, she longed for an hour of her own to play whatever she wanted. Now that she was given a late shift - she longed for an earlier one. She wanted to be able to take calls, to discuss important matters and tell funny stories about her small town life and only play music occasionally.

Sitting every night in an uncomfortable chair for an hour straight by herself left her feeling more like a DJ than a radio show presenter. Not to mention the lack of sleep was having a significant impact on her body.

All day, every day, Ringo was tired. By the time she reached home every night, it was nearing two thirty and she still constantly found herself restlessly turning in bed for at least an hour after. Often she joked that her under-eye bags could be used to carry groceries, but it was growing to be more of a serious comment than a joke.

The clicking of the door behind her startled her half to death, the girl reaching for the previously played record that was still laying out as she whipped around to see who had entered. At the sight of her boyfriend, holding his hands in the air as if the vinyl were a gun, she sighed in relief and slumped back.

"What were you going to do, play me music until I died?" He chuckled at his own remark, approaching her from behind her chair and wrapping his arms around her body. With a sigh, Ringo leaned her head against the crook of his elbow, huffing out a puff of air to blow the hair from her face.

"You look tired," Steve continued when she didn't reply, pressing a gentle kiss against the top of her head.

"I don't think I've gotten more than four hours of sleep in two months," she murmured, eyes closed as she spoke against his jacket sleeve.

"Do you want some coffee?" He questioned, tucking her strewn hair behind her ear and eyeing the equipment in front of them.

"No that'll make it worse," she admitted, shuffling out of his hold to turn and face him. Despite the fact she was ready to pass out at any moment, Ringo still managed a smile as he crouched down in front of her chair, giving her his undivided attention. "How was your day?"

"Really good," he beamed all of a sudden, mildly surprising her. "My mom and I had lunch together, and then we went shopping and she picked out a few outfits for me for college."

At this, she was struggling to keep a frown from developing.

"College?" Ringo enquired, tilting her head. "But you told me last week you didn't think you were going to college after all."

"I wasn't," he shook his head, his elation and good mood still painfully obvious. "But I don't know, she talked to me a lot at lunch and I feel like maybe it's something I should reconsider."

Steve had been spending all week with his mother - from hanging out, to searching for a new car and even redecorating his bedroom. Because of this, she had barely saw him - but she was too happy to see *him* happy that she couldn't feel annoyed by it. Her boyfriend didn't have a good relationship with either of his parents, and even though he'd never admit it - she knew he longed for what she had with Julia.

The difference was that Julia didn't have to buy things for Ringo to validate their relationship as mother and daughter.

"Oh," she replied simply, her smile dimming slightly, "well it's your choice, of course."

Steve wasn't a fool. And even if he was occasionally blind to a woman's emotions, they had been dating long enough for him to be able to tell when she wasn't being genuine.

"Hey," he stood up to reach her eye level, cupping his large hands around her cheeks and pecking her lips. "You're my girl. You know I'd come back every weekend."

Ringo couldn't help but melt under his touch, even if it didn't soothe away all of her worries as it normally did. She didn't have reason to be concerned about Steve's mother just yet, but she couldn't help it nonetheless. The last time they had suggested college, Ringo had made it clear she supported his decision either way but he was blatant about not wanting to go. Steve had spoken about wanting to find his direction, and how he didn't feel further education would help with that. Now, after one discussion with his mother, he had done a complete one-eighty.

Letting go of her, Steve turned back to the shelf of vinyls next to her station, flicking through each one to find something he liked and could ask her to play next. Smirking as his fingers brushed over a particular favourite, he turned before taking it out to ask her permission and was immediately silenced at the sight of her sleeping. Steve wished at that moment he had a Polaroid camera on his person, to show her how amusing she looked with her head lolled to the side and mouth wide open.

Replacing the record, he began to shrug out of his jacket, moving toward his girlfriend and gently placing it over her. 'Radio Ringo' still had a half hour left of play, but how difficult could it be?

When the current song finally came to an end, he crouched over the microphone after frantically searching for its 'on' button. Keeping his voice low to avoid waking her, he stayed standing as she had taken the only chair and spoke into the mike with a confident tone he

usually only adopted at high school.

"Uh- hey, guys! This is Steve," he stopped to clear his throat, casting a glance back to make sure she was still snoozing. "Ringo has fallen asleep, so apologies for any loud guttural noises - she's a snorer. Dedicated this next tune to my tired girlfriend, here's 'Asleep' by the Smiths."

Steve barely spoke much for the remainder of the show, simply announcing the next song before sliding on the record. Before he even realised, the hour was coming to an end and therefore the radio station was about to shut off, for Ringo was always the last to play and the last to leave.

Shoving her car keys into his pocket and deciding he could drive her himself to get her vehicle tomorrow, Steve carefully slid his hands underneath her body and lifted her from the chair. Ringo still didn't waken despite being jostled, leaving her partner to assume she truly was as tired as she had claimed. That, or she was enjoying being carried too much to ruin the moment.

There was a slight awkward moment as he departed the room where he had to open the door with his foot and flick the light switch off with an elbow, but he grinned in success as he neared the exit without any major disasters.

Perhaps it was too premature, for as he walked through the door the security guard held open for him, Steve accidentally whacked her head against the door frame.

"*Fuck!*" She howled in pain, blinking blearily as she leaned up in his arms and looked at her surroundings in confusion.

"Sorry! Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!" He babbled, grimacing as she rubbed the top of her head with her hand.

"Where am I?" She questioned, before her eyes widened almost comically in fear. "Oh my god! The show!"

"It's okay, I finished it," he reassured, smiling warmly to ensure her it went down without a disaster. Ringo eyed him suspiciously, but

eventually gave in and leaned into his chest once more. The second he placed her inside his car to drive her home, she was out like a light again.

"Oh look," Julia drily commented from the kitchen table, looking up from the letter she was pouring over as Ringo came into the kitchen. "It's Dawn of the Dead."

"Ha ha," Ringo rolled her eyes, seating herself down at the table before slumping into the crook of her arm. She certainly looked like something that had come from a grave - her usually sleek hair now unkempt, with a pale face and dark under eye circles. Ringo looked like how she *should* have looked in senior year if she had cared enough about classes.

"You're exhausted lately, must be from all the sex," she teased, for what was quite possibly the seventieth time that week. The 'condom' incident will go down in history as the worst mistake of her life, for Ringo was sure she would have received less hassle if she had outright committed murder.

The blonde couldn't even bend over to pick something up any more, or else her mother would run up with widened eyes and say 'don't do that, what if Steve walks in and gets tempted to defile you again!'

"I swear, I'll become a nun if you stop making sex jokes," she grumbled, her voice thick from tiredness. Sunny was sat casually across from her, sipping on orange juice and avidly reading a book. Even a mother teasing her daughter about her sex life wasn't enough to rouse the fostered teenager enough to join in.

"Does it pay well?" Julia replied with a chuckle, setting the letter down. There was an undertone in her voice that immediately set Ringo off, prompting the girl to turn to her curiously.

"Are you alright, mom?"

"I'm fine," she waved off with a sigh, "it's just one bill after another. I'm starting to doubt if we can even afford this dump."

"Mom," Ringo frowned, reaching her hand out and cupping her mother's forearm reassuringly. "I'll get a second job, help you out more."

"Don't be silly," Julia reprimanded, adopting a stony exterior to mask her inner concerns. "I should be able to provide for my own family. I'm the head of the house."

Her reply had finally roused something in Sunny, who glanced up from her book with a curious crease between her brows. The teenager glanced between the two blondes at the table with an expression Ringo couldn't quite decipher.

But it didn't matter what her mother said - she was setting out today to find a new job. She was eighteen now, and still under her mother's roof. It was the least she could do.

'Charlie's Convenience Store' was once a place that only ever reminded Ringo as the store from which she bought a can of Coke. A Coke she eventually sprayed over Carol's head in the alleyway behind the cinema.

But now - it was a location she would look at as her new place of work. 'Charlie' himself was both the owner and the manager, and rather sleazy in his nature. Nonetheless, he had given Ringo the job without so much as an interview. That alone would have given anyone cause for concern, but she knew they needed the money enough to overlook it.

A benefit to the position was being able to wear her own clothes - a downside was the hours he was already discussing giving her. Charlie wanted Ringo to work full-time, which would leave little time in her schedule at all to enjoy much of anything that Summer. Another upside was that she would be working alongside Ben during the day shifts, a rather backward boy who was a year younger but extremely friendly nonetheless.

"Ringo?" A voice called out, a quick look up confirming that it was Mike who had just entered, standing alongside Jane. His voice had gotten so incredibly deep over the span of a few months, Ringo

barely recognised it when she heard it.

"There's my favourite couple!" Ringo beamed, rounding the cash register with her arms in the air. "Look how beautiful you two look together!"

"Why do you say that every time you see us?" Jane breathed a laugh, grinning nonetheless. Her hair had grown to reach just above her shoulders now, and as the girl was starting to discover her own personal style of clothing, she was truly developing into a gorgeous young lady. Ringo couldn't have been prouder, having first seen her in 1983 and acknowledging the difference between then and now.

"Is it a crime to support your relationship?" She raised an eyebrow, returning to the register.

"It is when you started crying at our first dinner with my parents," Mike fired back, reaching for a Baby Ruth and shuffling for change inside his pocket with his free hand.

"Maybe I was just emotional that you ever left the basement to meet a damn girl in the first place," Ringo replied with a rising smirk as she processed his purchase and returned his change.

"Are you coming to Wheeler Friday tonight?" Jane interrupted, fighting off a laugh at the two's antics.

"Yeah, I'll be late though because I'm working here until ten," she held her hands up to gesture at her surroundings, "and then I'm leaving again for the radio show at one."

"God," Mike grimaced in disgust at her working hours, "being of legal working age sounds gross."

"Steve isn't coming, though," Ringo told them, a sullen expression morphing over her face. "His mom is taking him to dinner with some of her co-workers. But you'll finally get to meet Sunny, my mom wants me to bring her along and let her make friends. I warned her that you're all losers, but she was adamant."

"She better not scare easily," Mike warned as he began to back out of the store, "it's my night to pick a movie and I'm getting Fright Night."

Ringo shook her head at the thought, waving goodbye as they departed the store. The last thing she needed was to make her new foster sister hate her even more than she did. But perhaps even more scary than the prospect of an annoyed Sunny, was the idea of lunch the next day.

Steve finally told his mother he wanted her to meet his girlfriend, and thus, they were due to have lunch tomorrow to formally introduce the two. Ringo was already stiff at the thought of what would surely be an uncomfortable meal, but once she heard the name of the restaurant it only furthered. *Of course*, his mother had picked out the most fancy and over-priced place in town. Honestly, the blonde would have been happy with a couple of sandwiches and a glass of water in their house. What was the need for showing off?

The car ride from their apartment, where Ringo had just collected Sunny, had been relatively quiet thus far. But the blonde was growing accustomed to her foster sister's perpetually quiet demeanour. She barely tried any more to elicit conversation with her, but Julia hadn't quite reached that stage just yet. It broke Ringo's heart to see her mother try so hard and still be unable to penetrate Sunny's stubbornness.

"These kids are losers," Ringo warned her with a low chuckle as they neared closer to the Wheeler house, "like I'm talking proper geeky shit. Dungeons and Dragons, and everything."

"What if-" Sunny cut herself off, surprising Ringo by the newfound softness in her voice. "Look, I don't want to be here any more than you want to take me. So I'll show my face for a while and then when they inevitably ignore me, can we just leave?"

"Why do you think they'd ignore you?" Ringo questioned as she pulled in to park, darting her eyes back and forth between the girl in the passenger side and the curb.

"I've seen this before, okay? Look at this freakin' house!" She gestured to the building they had parked in front of. "Middle-class kids don't want to associate with the poor foster girl."

"I think you'll be pleasantly surprised," Ringo answered, her heart saddening as she finally caught a glimpse of the girl underneath that Sunny was hiding. The kid didn't get that notion from the top of her head, she was sure. But the blonde promised herself she would personally kick their asses if they lived up to Sunny's expectations.

They were the last to arrive as expected, the movie only in its opening credits when they ventured down the stairs to the basement.

"Hey!" Ringo called out with frustration, "you weren't supposed to start without me!"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Mike sarcastically replied, a hand over his chest for effect. "Why don't I just put my entire life plans on hold as well for you?"

"Hey!" Max greeted after lifting herself up from the bean bag she had sunk into, marching up to the girl next to Ringo with a friendly grin. "Sunny, right? We weren't sure which M&Ms you liked, so we got a bag of each!"

Sunny visibly reeled from the girls words, obviously not expecting to be considered when they had bought their junk food for the night. Casting a somewhat nervous glance towards her foster sister, she gave a timid smile of her own and followed after the ginger towards the others in their age group.

"Oh, she is just *adorable*," Jessica awed once Ringo plopped onto the couch next to her, all eyes fixed on the group who were in the process of introducing themselves. Her heart warmed at the slightest of smiles Sunny wore, knowing it was the only one she had seen since the girl's arrival.

"Where's Steve?" Nancy's words brought her out of her thoughts, her cousin curled comfortably into Jonathan's side with a bowl of popcorn between them.

"He's at a dinner with his mom."

"Oh, that bitch," Jessica rolled her eyes to the heavens above, ripping the giant bowl from Jonathan's lap and narrowing her eyes when

they looked at her incredulously. "What? You think because you're a couple the bowl is just for you two? You make me sick."

"Cuddling in the corner like a pair of weirdos," Ringo tsked, joining in on the teasing. "And in front of the kids too."

"Perverting their young and innocent minds," Jessica shook her head in disgust. "What if they grow up to be heterosexual now because of you two?"

"You're both assholes," Jonathan commented drily, ripping the pillow out from underneath him in order to fire it straight at the two giggling girls. Despite not having her boyfriend by her side for the first time since he had originally started coming on Fridays, she was glad she had her friends there nonetheless.

A little bit of a slow chapter, but remember nothing really action-related can happen until season 3 comes out!

Hope you all liked it, so happy to see that some people who read the first book are continuing to read this one!

RedVelvetPanPan - well you know it's like fluffy towels, they all get less comfortable after a while ;)

TacoPhoenix88 - Ohhhh hello again! So glad to see you're still reading! I'm happy you like Sunny, it's hard introducing a new OC when the cast is already so developed but I feel like she could fit right in! And ohhhh yes Sunny, Jane and Max could very well be the next Jessica/Ringo/Nancy - three cheers for girl power! So happy you liked that chapter, hope you like what's to come too and as always have a lovely day!

Vince Basile Jr - Hello you! I do think that Robin was created to be Steve's love interest in Season 3, which I don't think I'll really like because a) I've gotten so attached to Ringo and Steve it wouldn't feel right and b) I don't really like the idea of only introducing female characters to be love interests, you know? Like Max was brought in and fit so well with them all, so maybe Robin will too but I just don't know!

candy95 - Hahahah I'm so glad you liked it! Hope you like what's to come too! x

JosieOfTheRose - I had the condom idea in my mind for MONTHS I couldn't wait to write it any more every time I listen to that song Connection by Elastica it reminds me of it hahaha

Court725 - As you said, it's always good to have a little drama! Oh Julia hasn't seen Steve yet since it happened I can't wait to write that part, I'm glad that I brought Julia to Hawkins in the last book because I think there's so much development to Ringo's character when she's around and I just love writing her. Thank you so much!

4. Bald Patch

"OH, THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE WEARING," Julia commented when her daughter re-emerged into the kitchen, carefully eyeing the dress Ringo had slipped into for the upcoming lunch date. It was soft pink in colour, with white flowers for its design. It was very girly, and the single mother didn't doubt she probably borrowed it from Nancy, but it wasn't anything she had seen the blonde wear before. Ringo herself even looked uncomfortable in it.

"What's wrong with this?" she groaned in frustration, flicking her long hair back over her shoulders and nervously checking the full length mirror in the hallway once more. Ringo had spent near an hour picking out the perfect outfit in Nancy's house the night before, but judging by the looks her mother gave her efforts were futile.

"Oh, it's lovely," Julia spoke, forcing a smile all the while. "If you were a twelve year old going to her bat-mitzvah." Sunny let out a grunt of amusement while her mouth wrapped around the spoonful of cereal, causing her foster mother to grin in success. Slowly but surely, the girl was opening up to their small family. Just yesterday, Sunny even set the forks and knives out on the table for dinner without anyone asking her to. And she has stopped clogging the toilet with an excess amount of toilet paper - leading Julia to believe maybe she had been doing it on purpose before.

"Mom!" Ringo whined like a child, expression twisting with panic as she eyed the clock on the wall. "He's going to be here any minute! And it was the nicest dress Nancy had, Mrs Harrington is taking us to the poshest frickin' place in town."

"Language!" she scolded, sending an obvious glance towards the youngest girl seated at the table. Sunny looked up from her bowl of Frosted Flakes with a quizzical reaction.

"Fuck, don't stop on my account," she shrugged, a comment Ringo would have laughed at if she wasn't as tightly wound as a string on a violin. Her chest had fluttered with nerves all day, and to make matters worse - she would have to work at the store just after the lunch date.

"I don't see why you're trying to impress her, you're not dating her you're with her son," Julia sighed, teetering around the kitchen and tidying as she went. It was the first Saturday she had been given off work since starting, and she wanted to bring the two girls to Indianapolis for a day of bonding.

"Well she already doesn't like me, I need to try and impress the stuck-up, old bit- excited! So excited!" she suddenly exclaimed, changing her tone and remark halfway through when a knock at the door interrupted her. The walls of their apartment were notoriously thin, God only knew if Steve had already heard her ranting about his mother.

"He's not allowed past the threshold," Julia warned with a careful look in her eye, "I don't want him to try and sex you up in the bathroom."

"Mom," Ringo hissed lowly in warning as she bounded for the front door, "he can probably hear you!"

"I know."

"Sex is a swear word too, you know," Sunny casually commented as she lifted her bowl and took it towards the sink, leaving her guardian grimacing at her mistake. Meanwhile, Ringo was slapping her best grin across her cheeks the second she opened the door enough to get a view of her boyfriend, who looked positively immaculate in a sweater and jeans. Sex in the bathroom didn't sound too off the cards, after seeing him.

"Hey babe," he greeted cheerily, leaning in for a kiss. Although she didn't miss the way he too quirked an eyebrow at her outfit choice. Insecurely, the blonde reached down and tugged it lower over her thighs, hoping that it wasn't too short. She was a great deal taller than Nancy, and a little less thin. Where the dress had reached Nancy's knee at a respectable length, it only went to the middle of Ringo's thigh. Not to worry though, she just wouldn't be able to bend down and pick anything up.

"Ready to go?" Ringo prompted after angling her head up for him to meet her lips, stepping forward and preparing to shut the door.

Smartly, he held an elbow up for her to hold onto, pursing his lips to look rather posh.

"Why yes," he spoke in a comically nasal voice, leaving Ringo wondering if he was mimicking his father. "Shall we depart for our brunch, darling?"

"The fuck is brunch?" she reeled in confusion, lazily slapping her hand to rest on the crook of his elbow. Together, they walked down the hallway towards the stairwell.

"Breakfast-lunch," he rolled his eyes, dropping the stereotypical upper-class act. "My mom is meeting us there, what's in the bag?"

"Clothes to change into for work," she explained, hiking the backpack higher up her shoulder. "There's not a chance I'm wearing this to hand out candy and cigarettes to teenagers. Plus, the manager seems like the type to chance his arm."

"Do I need to be worried?" Steve questioned, eyebrows furrowing at her statement.

"Of me leaving you for a fifty-three year old man who smells like piss and has a beer gut?" she sarcastically remarked, "you should be *positively* terrified."

"Not of that," he sighed in exasperation, holding the car door open for her to climb inside and only continuing after climbing inside the driver's seat. "I mean, do I need to be worried of him making you uncomfortable? 'Cause I'll drop that bitch."

"No, I think he's harmless," she giggled at his serious demeanor, buckling the seat belt securely over her chest and pulling her mixtape out of her coat pocket to play in his tape deck. "Besides, I think I'd go to Jessica for an ass-whooping before you, sorry babe."

Steve scoffed in offence, one hand splayed over his chest and eliciting a loud laugh from his girlfriend next to him. Together, with the sound of 'Somebody To Love' by Queen playing in the background, they made their way to *La Lumiere* - the fanciest restaurant that had ever and would ever hit Hawkins. Picking off the pink nail polish

Nancy had expertly applied to her nails the night before, Ringo tried to push down the swell of dread that rose in her body.

La Lumiere had chandeliers. Freaking *chandeliers*, in a restaurant designed mainly for lunch dates! The waiters had tiny little bow ties, and the female staff wore their hair in ponytails tied so tightly back that Ringo cringed at the thought of the headache they surely had. She also didn't recognise any of the current customers, and even though she was wearing one of Nancy's most expensive day dresses, she somehow still felt under dressed. Perhaps heels instead of a chuffed pair of sandals Ringo had tugged from the back of her closet, that were now a size too small from having been bought at the age of fifteen, would have been the better choice.

Lily Harrington stood up to greet them, her lips lifting in a smile that looked uncomfortable but she was seemingly making an effort to be nice - surely Ringo could do the same. Her tense shoulders began to relax slightly when the elder woman ushered for them to sit down politely, although the blonde didn't fail to notice that she had strategically sat in a chair that separated them both. There would be no under the table hand clutching under Lily's eye, no sir.

"Lovely to see you, Rango- was it?" Lily began, a detached yet calculating look in her eye as Ringo almost choked on her spit with amusement.

"No, no," she shook her head, meeting Steve's eye across the table and chuckling as his booming laughter filled the restaurant. "It's Ringo. And lovely to be invited, Lily."

"Oh please, call me Mrs Harrington," she spoke with a tinkle of a laugh, voice so deceptively polite that Ringo almost missed that she told her not to address her by her first name. Even Steve seemed to not hear her, his attention focused on the menu in his hands. Desperate for the distraction, she lifted her own menu and began to scan through it, eyes narrowing as she didn't recognise any of the items on it.

It wasn't long before the waiter arrived asking if they were ready to order, with *Mrs Harrington* jumping to agree before Ringo could even

breathe. Anxiously she blinked, rapidly reading it once again as Steve and his mother began to rattle off orders. Soon enough, the man was turning to the blonde teenager, patiently for her own choice.

"Um," she stammered nervously, eyes once again darting over the likes of 'bouillabaisse', 'croque monsieur' and 'beef bourguignon'. "Do you have an English menu? I'm sorry, I don't speak French."

Lily laughed heartily as if it was the funniest joke she had ever heard, even going so far as to place her hand on the waiter's arm as if she were ready to fall straight out of her chair. Something in the ring of it told Ringo that it wasn't as genuine as the woman was trying to make it sound.

"Oh Steve," she said when her laugh finally dropped to a chuckle, "where did you find this one? She's positively hilarious."

Steve, knowing his girlfriend better than most and picking up on the way she rubbed her hands together and shuffled around, was aware it wasn't a joke at all. Giving her a sympathetic smile, he closed his own menu and held it up in the air towards the waiter.

"Just get her the same as me," he nodded with finality, meeting her eye again and smirking at her desperate glance of gratitude. Yes, he truly did know her well.

"So," Lily started once more, cupping her hands under her chin and feigning interest, "where did you two meet?"

"Well-" Ringo cut herself off, not entirely sure how to put 'he was banging my cousin and decided he liked me more' into a sentence that better rolled off the tongue. "Mutual friends," she settled on saying.

"Ah!" the older woman raised her eyebrows, looking back to her son for confirmation. "Which friend? Was it Tommy? Patrick? Joey?"

"Come on, Mom," Steve interrupted with a warning tone in his voice, "you know I don't talk to them any more."

"Oh yes, that's right," she nodded, not looking at all surprised or apologetic. "You never did tell me why. Those boys used to come

around the house ever since kindergarten."

"They're jerks, that's all there is to it," he shrugged. "It was actually.. uh- it was actually Nancy who introduced us."

Ringo's expression immediately became stoic. There were two n-words she would have abhorred Steve to say at that moment, one was a disgusting and racist slur, the other was his ex-girlfriend's name.

"Nancy Wheeler," Lily shook her head with a polite smile, looking off into the distance as if reminiscing. "Such a sweet girl, whatever happened to her?"

"Mom," Steve called out, expression falling into one of annoyance and disapproval. "We talked about this, come on."

"Of course," Lily grimaced apologetically, placing her hand over Ringo's on top of the table to comfort her. "I am sorry, Ringo. You're a lovely girl too. Tell me, what do you do for a living? Are you still in school?"

"It's alright," she meekly responded, feeling somewhat more confident with herself when she saw the thankfulness in Steve's eyes. Had it been *anyone* else, Ringo would have up and left by now. "No, I was in Steve's year as well. I'm currently working two jobs at the minute, that little convenience store across from the theater and at Hawkins FM. I even have my own radio show!"

Her tone had picked up animatedly when the topic of *Radio Ringo* had been introduced, finally something she was happy to discuss. Unfortunately, Lily never asked her to elaborate on either job and simply changed the subject.

"And what college are you going to?" she prompted, causing Steve to physically slap a hand over his face behind her back.

"I'm... um- not going to any," Ringo admitted before curling her lips inward awkwardly, forcing herself to look away from the clear disapproval in Lily's eyes.

"Why's that?"

"I got accepted into places, but I could never afford to go, so."

"So you're just going to work in the store for the rest of your life," Lily stated, although it wasn't a question - more of an accusation. Beads of sweat began to form at the back of the blonde's neck, finding the conversation worse than an appointment with the school career guidance officer. Thankfully, Steve answered before she had to.

"What's with the interrogation?" Steve demanded, leaning his elbows on the table. His mother and he had gotten along well since her return, but not once had she acted like this during that time. Lily Harrington was visibly making Ringo uncomfortable and seemingly enjoying it.

"I'm just trying to get to know your new girlfriend!"

"You know what," Ringo slid her chair backward with a fake apologetic expression, "I'm so sorry but I have to get to work. I thought they'd cook the food faster. Enjoy your 'cock mon-sur', or whatever it's called."

"Wait, no-" Steve tried to stop her, standing up at the same time and holding out his hand in protest. Lily stayed silent, bringing her glass of distilled water to her lips and sipping delicately. Before her son could stop the blonde from leaving the table, she had already marched out. It was probably a mistake on her behalf, she was fully aware, but Ringo wasn't going to spend a second longer being insulted.

Lily didn't like her, that much was clear. In the short span of time since the Wheeler daughter had arrived, she was compared to Nancy, laughed at and had her lifestyle scrutinised. All before the god forsaken food had even arrived. The mature response would be to sit and take it on the chin, praying for the lunch to end quickly or even returning Lily Harrington's quick whips with clever responses of her own, for her boyfriend's sake. But Ringo had been looked down upon her whole life by the upper class for living in a trailer park, she'd be damned if she would let this woman blatantly do it as well, who was stirring up old emotions and feelings she had long suppressed.

"Ringo, wait!" Steve called out, catching onto her elbow and stopping

her before she set off down the street completely. "I'll give you a ride, I'm so sorry! I have no idea why she acted like that!"

"I do," the blonde scoffed, but marched toward the car nonetheless. The shoes were deeply cutting into the sides of her feet, and she didn't want to spend the day working in them. "She just doesn't like me."

"How could she *not*?" he refuted, throwing his hands up in the air. "Everyone likes you. You knocked out Billy Hargrove and he'd still kill to get in your pants."

"Well I don't think my physical appearance is going to sexually seduce your mother, Steve," she argued back, a disgusted tone in her voice.

"I'm sorry, alright?" he sighed, dragging his hand over his face after peeling out of the parking spot. "I just wanted you two to get along. You're my girlfriend, and I love you. I was hoping that would be enough for her."

"Are you saying that I'm not enough regardless of that?" Ringo insecurely inquired, the familiar sensation of doubt creeping in her mind like it had ever since she found out Steve hadn't told his family they were together.

"Are you kidding?" He rolled his eyes as he spoke, keeping one hand on the wheel and grabbing her hand with the other, their joined fingers resting in the middle. "You're *more* than enough. You're like if Stevie Nicks and Mick Jagger had a baby."

Against her own saddened mood, she couldn't help the chuckle that rose at his words.

"Because I have killer dance moves?" she beamed, finding comfort in the tight squeeze of his palm against hers.

"*Sure*," he sarcastically agreed, eyes darting everywhere but her. "Shame you didn't get your dad's lips though."

The blonde's response was to reach out and harshly pinch the back of his bicep - the body's most sensitive part she had once called it. Steve

yelled and dropped his hand from hers to bat her away, the laughter rising between the couple washing away memories of the disastrous *brunch* date.

"Peanut?" Ben offered, holding the bag in her general direction. Business had been dragging that day, apparently it had been since the introduction of the new mall. As dreary as the days were in the suffocatingly hot store, Ringo found comfort in the newfound friendship she had formed with Ben Waters.

He was the year below in school, or at least she thought so. And quite possibly the kindest person she had yet to meet. Ben wouldn't have harmed a fly, even if said fly had swallowed up his entire family. He truly was a gentle soul - and wouldn't last ten minutes with Ringo and her friends relentless teasing.

"No thanks," she shrugged, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand and shivering with disgust at the slickness of her skin. "Charlie seriously needs to sort out the air conditioning in here, my bra is damp enough to grow mould at this rate."

Ben flushed adorably in embarrassment after her mention of her undergarments, and it struck Ringo that he had likely never had female friends, much less a girlfriend.

"Y-yeah my boxer shorts are so wet-" he stammered, doing suspicious hand signals as if he was mimicking what a stereotypical gangster would do. Ben's eyes widened as soon as he realised what he had said, his neck turning an unhealthy shade of dark red.

"What, did you piss yourself, Ben?" Ringo teased, clamping a hand over her mouth to keep from laughing loud enough to shame him further.

"I listened to your radio show last night, by the way," his face lit up as he spoke, but then again - Ben was so genuine he would light up talking about the bus timetable. "Loved it! Love your music taste!"

"Oh, thank you!" She beamed at his compliment, it wasn't often that people told her they listened much less actually praise her choices of

songs. The creak of the door caught their attention, flying off of whatever they had been leaning lazily against to look professional for customers. Immediately, Ringo relaxed once more at the sight of a familiar floppy head of sandy-coloured hair.

"Hey Rin'," Jonathan greeted with a nod, sidling up to the counter and resting his elbows against it. "What's up?"

"The sky," she remarked in a dry tone, snickering when he dramatically rolled his eyes at a reply she had used far too many times for it to even be considered a joke any more.

"How'd it go with Steve's mom?"

"She's an old bag who probably flosses her teeth with the severed fingers of orphans," Ringo answered without qualms, chuckling once more as Ben balked beside her. He had been pretending not to listen before now, but obviously exposed himself.

"Jesus," Jonathan whistled, trailing towards the fridge for a can of coke and simultaneously rifling through his pockets for change. "That bad?"

"Was World War II *that* bad?" She cocked an eyebrow, resting her chin in her hands as Ben began to process the purchase for her.

"Well if it's any consolation," Jonathan began, a rising smirk on his features. "My mom said that when they went to school together she stuck gum in Steve's mom's hair for calling them a waste of space, and everyone called her Bald Patch Lily for a year."

"You know how I try to be uber-feminist and support other women? Well *fuck* that. That's the best thing I've ever heard."

"Are you still going to Jessica's party next Saturday?" he asked, aware that her commitment to partying had likely weaned since she worked nightly at one in the morning.

"Yeah, I told my boss this was a once in a lifetime opportunity and that Jessica has a hot tub," she shrugged, sneakily slipping a salted peanut from Ben's bag and popping it into her mouth. "He told me to record an hour to play that night, it just won't be live it'll be a tape."

"Alright," Jonathan nodded, starting to back away from the counter. "Don't forget, you and Steve are on alcohol duty because you're legal!"

"Whatever Tiny Tim," she rolled her eyes, wiping her hands against her jeans to rid them of crumbs. "Are you coming, Ben?"

"I can't I've got... homework."

"It's Summer?" she pointed out with confusion, watching as he nervously stammered and grimaced.

"Yeah so it's *really* overdue."

This whole Steve's mom thing might seem a little pointless now, but it's really important in the new arc in ringo's character development. There are a lot of issues she had in the last book that never really got resolved I'd love to sort out now that I have time before season 3 airs!

Also I know some people don't like to read about face claims and just imagine whoever they want but BEN WATERS IS 1000% TOM HOLLAND I AM SORRY. I've received such positive responses for Sunny I hope nobody minds Ben either (he's not going to in be some kind of love triangle for ringo, don't worry)

Thanks for reading!

RedVelvetPanPan - MHmhMhMhm what's that coming over the hill? It's ANGST

Vince Basile Jr - Ahhhh thank you so much! I'm so happy you liked that moment with Sunny and the gang, much like there was a gap that Ringo fit into I feel like Sunny could easily fit in with the younger group. It's also my attempt at diversifying them a little bit, because right now they're just a bunch of middle class kids (bar Eleven) and a character like Sunny is soooo important in modern times

Guest - I would literally die for Sunny as well

candy95 - I'm glad that you recognise this tension with his mom as frustrating as it may be will make them stronger eventually! There's more to come from that as well. Thanks for commenting as always!
x

Court725 - It still surprises me that people like not only the protagonist who's an OC, but also Jessica who's an OC side character! Hope you liked this chapter! As for Sunny being a love interest, I'm honestly not too sure yet because on one hand I can see her with Dustin but on the other I could also see her being all like "I don't need a man I'm a boss ass bitch" haha, thank you as always!

5. Low Point

"I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH, RINGO," Julia Wheeler sighed emotionally as an envelope was set down on the table by her forearm. She wasn't one for wearing her heart on her sleeve, but when a final notice for the rent had landed in her mail box that morning she was more grateful for Ringo's monetary support than ever.

"It's nothing, Mom," the blonde shrugged, a proud smile on her lips as she set her plate into the sink. Seeing the relief settle onto her mother's shoulders gave the work so much meaning, even if it had been the longest week of her life. Ringo felt bad for complaining - people worked full time jobs all the time, but she wondered if others worked full time and then lost sleep to work a late night radio show as well.

The owner of Hawkins FM had come to be more than impressed with *Radio Ringo*, and asked if she would be able to extend it from an hour slot at one in the morning, to a three hour show that started at twelve and ended at three. Ringo agreed apprehensively, knowing that there was no possible way she would be able to catch up on sleep now, but also aware that she had found her niche in the radio station and wanted to impress.

The extra two hours had meant she was getting less sleep than ever, and the signs were clearly visible. She felt as if her brain function had been halved, barely being able to keep up with conversations. Her confidence had taken a massive hit as well, with dark circles seemingly permanently etched underneath her eyes and break outs littering her cheeks and forehead. She was a far cry from the girl she was at the start of Summer, but if it meant her mother could feel somewhat financially secure for the first time in her life - she decided it was all worth it.

Working so much had massively started to impact her personal life, with the previous night being the first time that she had ever missed a Wheeler Family Friday.

"I'm almost glad I have work today, the last time I got a day off Karen

dragged me to the swimming pool" Julia began to complain, rolling her eyes as she scrubbed her dish clean in the sink. "The kid they're preying on even approached me, Billy something."

"Billy Hargrove?" Ringo sputtered in shock after almost choking on her spit, "what did he say?"

"He said something along the lines of 'looking good Mrs Wheeler,'" she scoffed in disgust, tucking her long blonde hair behind her ears as she fluttered around the kitchen. "So I told him, 'pipe down man-child, I've had indigestion older than you.'"

Despite the peculiarity of the crossover between Billy and her mother, Ringo barked a laugh. She certainly didn't have to worry about her mother's bedroom activities, if there were any in the first place.

Her mother rushed from the kitchen, diligently preparing herself to go to her own place of work in the city and leaving her real and fostered daughter alone.

"You look like shit," Sunny commented suddenly, although there was less of a bite and edge to her voice than normal. Ringo thought her tiredness was playing with her brain when the idea that the girl was actually concerned for her crossed her mind.

"Thanks," she drily responded, tying her somewhat greasy blonde hair back into a ponytail. She only hoped that Steve wouldn't come to visit her at work today and see how truly horrible she looked. Ringo wasn't ever one to dote over her own appearance, but that was before she began breaking out and had less time to spend on herself. Jessica's party was set for tonight, and she was more than excited to see her friends and boyfriend for the first time in days.

"Wheeler?" Charlie's voice met her ears while the blonde was busy trying to listen Ben's story about how his mother used to slip vitamins into his potatoes to make him eat them. The manager was hidden in the stock room, sorting out the newest delivery, when he called out for her assistance. The blonde rounded the corner with a silent sigh - Charlie only ever asked *her* for assistance, never Ben. Any extra shifts

that needed covered would only go to her instead of anyone else. And she was growing tired of it.

"Coming!" she called back merrily, narrowing her eyes at Ben as the boy began to snicker at her obviously fake demeanour. Bounding into the room, she was met with the sight of the elder man, his hands on his hips as he regarded upon the top row of the shelves, which were lined with tin cans.

"My back isn't what it used to be, could you climb up and fetch those beans from the top?" Charlie inquired innocently, leaving her holding back a sigh as she began to shakily trail up the ladder. There were beans on lower shelves, but there was little point in telling *him* that.

"Not those ones," he interrupted her thoughts suddenly, pointing vigorously upward. "The ones in the very back."

This time she couldn't restrain her eye roll, her face shielded from view in the midst of bean cans and dust as she stood on the top rung of the ladder and bent over to reach the ones further back. At that moment, Ben appeared in the doorframe with a curious gaze, eyes honing in on their manager - who had his own eyes fixated on the blonde's behind as she was bent over the top shelf.

"Charlie?" he coughed in interruption, pushing down the bile that threatened to rise up his throat. Initially, he genuinely thought that the elder man chose Ringo for all the grunt work out of spite or because she was a hard worker. But now, he had other speculations. "There's a customer demanding to see you."

Grunting in frustration, the grey-haired man slowly backed away from the scene and exited towards the front of the shop. There was no one there, of course, but the short departure was enough time for Ringo to fetch the desired pack of beans and begin her descent down the ladder. Charlie was visibly displeased as he returned.

"There was no one there."

"They must have left," Ben shrugged, not caring that much if he looked suspicious or not as he ushered his blonde friend back to the front. She didn't miss how shaken he looked all of a sudden,

furrowing her eyebrows out of concern for the boy.

"Are you alright?" she questioned, keeping her voice low to avoid getting caught by anyone listening.

"Ringo," Ben sighed, darting his eyes back to the doorway and making sure their sleazy shop-owner wasn't about to make a reappearance. "Don't ever be alone with him if you can help it. And call me to accompany you if he asks to see you."

"Why?" she exhaled sharply, becoming increasingly worried about his newly serious demeanour and stance.

"He's just a slimy guy," Ben shook his head, shivering with disgust once again at the thought of the man openly peering at Ringo's body, as if he wasn't three times her age.

"I know," she swallowed thickly, darting her gaze knowingly off to the left. "I don't really have a choice, I need the money. But don't worry, okay? I took down Billy Hargrove, I can handle Charlie."

"Billy Hargrove?" Ben echoed in wonder, eyes wide and fixated on her as she returned to the candy racks she had originally been shelving. "But he's so... *big*!"

"Size doesn't matter," she cheekily winked in his direction, laughing thereafter as his face turned a dark shade of red. They were interrupted mid-laughter by the ding of a bell above the door, signalling their first customer since the start of Ringo's shift. The mall really had taken its toll on the local businesses, but Ringo threw all loyalty to the small town out the window the second she saw the vast array of stores the establishment had to offer. They had a *whole* store dedicated to just selling shoes, where before the only shoes available were from a small rack inside *McCauley's Clothing* - meaning almost every girl her age wore the same shoes.

"Chief!" Ringo beamed as Hopper stepped inside, awkwardly nodding his head toward the blonde and smirking triumphantly as Ben visibly jumped at the sight of his police badge and uniform. "What brings you in?"

"I need to talk to you about something," he announced, pointedly staring at Ben until the boy scampered out the back of the store to give them privacy, shaken from the encounter. "Is that kid on dope or something?"

"Ben's scared you'll find dope on him even though he doesn't have any, do you really think he's the type to buy drugs?" she snickered as she raised an eyebrow, leaning over the counter and lowering her voice in case either her manager or co-worker could hear out back. "What's up? Is Jane okay?"

"El's fine," Jim sighed, resting a forearm on the candy stand. "But I kind of need your help. I need to get her away from that little shithead cousin of yours, she's too obsessed with him and frankly I'm about one loving gaze away from pulling my gun out."

"I'm ignoring the fact you just threatened my cousin's life because Father Hopper is just too adorable," she awed, cupping her hands underneath her chin. "So what do you need me to do? Restrain him? Scare him with statistics of teenage pregnancies?"

"God, no. Just... she doesn't really have many female figures in her life to model after. Can you just hang out with her or something? She can't go anywhere too public but I'm sure you could find something."

"She could come to the radio station for my show tomorrow night if you don't mind her being out late? I can drive her," Ringo offered with a growing smile, visions circling in her mind of dragging Sunny, Jessica, Nancy and Max along too and dedicating her show to the best anthems by female musicians. Eleven had already missed out on so much of her social development all of her life, and if she was completely honest - she thought perhaps the young telekinetic was too emotionally immature to be able to handle a relationship just yet. What the younger girl needed was a good healthy dose of woman power from none other than Hawkins finest feminists. Who better to influence her than a foster kid, a lesbian, a nerd, a tomboy and a proclaimed 'whore'?

"Is the fact you're driving supposed to comfort me?" he asked, slipping his signature hat back over his head and giving her a teasing smirk.

"Is your hat supposed to hide the fact you're balding?" she fired back with a smile of her own, laughing as his face dropped in warning before disappearing from sight.

"There's my *baby*!" Steve exclaimed as his girlfriend finally made an appearance at Jessica's party, voice slurred from the number of drinks he had already consumed. Luckily for Ringo, she wouldn't have to deal with her intoxicated friends sober, as she had drank quick sips from a bottle of vodka as her mother gave her a ride to the house, in an effort to catch up with everyone else who had arrived hours before.

"Hey sugar tits," Ringo's face lit up as she skipped toward her boyfriend, rolling onto her toes and planting a kiss in greeting onto his lips - which tasted like a strange mixture of beer and peppermint ice cream. Finally feeling as if she could relax for the first time in a while, the blonde stood next to him as they leaned against the kitchen counter and curled into his side, welcoming his arm that wrapped around her naturally. "What did I miss?"

"Nancy- that's *this* Nancy!" he shouted a few octaves higher than normal as he pointed an accusing finger at her cousin across the room, catching her attention. "She isn't drinking!"

"I don't want to be hungover!" the girl groaned, obviously frustrated after being taunted by almost everyone at the party already. "I have to work tomorrow, newspapers don't just stop printing for a day! Plus, don't you want a ride home?"

"Did Robin come yet?" Ringo diverted attention away from Nancy, fully aware that the brunette didn't truly like drinking and only did so when she felt forced by her peers. Ringo wasn't one of those peers.

"You invited Robin," Steve groaned, throwing his head back in childlike frustration until the smaller woman whacked his chest.

"You invited Robin?" Jessica repeated - albeit her tone was much lighter and maybe, just maybe, even a little excited.

"Yes I did," Ringo smirked proudly, hoping that her meddling would

lead to a new relationship in their little gang. Truth be told, she liked Robin. She was sarcastic, friendly and fit into a space in their friendship group they didn't even know existed until she arrived. Perhaps Ringo would have liked to bring Jessica and Robin together and finally see her best friend get to be happy, but it wasn't just because they were the only two open lesbians in Hawkins. They shared a similar sense of humour and outlook on the world, which caused them both to stray from any particularly large group of friends in school.

The party continued on and Ringo was finally handed a drink - a red solo cup filled to the brim with a fruity concoction of vodka, rum and pineapple juice. It was strong enough to trigger a gag reflex, but she persevered, longing for the freeing sense of being drunk. The woman wanted to drink and forget about the work she had tomorrow, or the money her family needed or even the fact her boyfriend's mother was a stone cold bitch.

"Are you alright?" Steve murmured into her ear, eyebrows furrowing in a concerned manner as he scanned her expression, not failing to see how quickly she was making her way through drinks. Even drunk, he knew from the second she walked in that there was something off about her.

"Yeah," Ringo stammered, surprised that he had noticed anything. Forcing her best smile, she slipped her hand into his and dragged him toward the rest of their group in the living room - which now included Robin, who was answering a general question asked about why she chose to apply for *Scoops Ahoy!*

"Cheap Trick are playing in Indianapolis in October, I needed money for tickets," she shrugged in explanation, causing Jonathan and Ringo to wildly meet eyes across the couches.

"Cheap Trick?" they demanded in sync, excitement laced through their voices.

"Yeah," Robin perked up at their recognition, looking between the two, "are you guys going?"

"I didn't know they were coming, I'll definitely go," Jonathan crossed

his arms, becoming more relaxed. He wasn't always immediately comfortable when someone new came into their little group - always feeling more at ease with people he trusted due to an overall negative high school experience. But Robin was proving to be the type of friend that would be right up his alley.

"I'll go too," Nancy volunteered, shooting a doting smile at Jonathan.

"What the hell, I'm up for it," Jessica added, unable to fight off a rising grin when Robin shot her a bashful look. The group then turned their attentions to Steve and Ringo, waiting for their confirmation as well.

"I'm gonna sit this one out, you guys go ahead," Ringo admitted as she awkwardly wrapped her arms around herself in a hug, the effects of the alcohol diminishing slightly.

"What?" they all groaned collectively, pouting with disappointment and screwing up their noses.

"But babe," Steve whined, sitting down on the side of the armchair and tugging her forward until she was standing between his legs, their fingers intertwined. "You love concerts. I'll even let you sit on my shoulders again."

"I can't really afford a ticket right now, but you guys go ahead!" she encouraged, hoping that it would be the end of the conversation.

"It's not on until October, can't you save up?" Nancy recoiled in confusion, leaving her cousin inwardly sighing. Between gas money and paying towards her family, there wasn't any money to *save*.

"Look," Jessica intervened, aware that her friend had enough financial issues at that point in time, "why don't we all pitch in and get you a ticket? It won't be much if we all pay towards it. It could be a really really early birthday present!"

"Thanks, but no thanks," she replied coolly, darting her gaze off to the side. The group were baffled by her rejection of a free ticket - everyone except Steve, that is. All the Harrington boy had to do was take one look at her expression and be able to read it like a book.

"Ringo it's no problem, honestly!" Nancy urged obliviously, growing frustrated as the blonde continued to shake her head. "It's freakin' free, come on."

"She doesn't want to go," Steve interrupted protectively, noticing the signs that his girlfriend was becoming increasingly tense - the stiffening of her shoulders and curl of her lips.

"We know that you're a little behind on money lately, it's honestly no big deal-"

"I don't want your fucking charity, alright?" Ringo snapped, in an explosive outburst Steve had been steadily predicting since they had turned on her. The pressure of several eyes trained on her like spotlights while her financial issues were openly debated and belittled would be enough to embarrass anyone, and Ringo had already been acting distant from the second she arrived.

"Come on," Steve prompted, standing up and slipping his hands onto her waist in an attempt to drag her from the horrendously awkward scene. Leading his partner towards the emptied hallway, Steve was nearly completely sober by the time they reached the staircase - where he encouraged her to sit down next to him.

"What's going on?" he demanded, concern for her well-being filling him. His dark eyes were fixated on her face as it slowly crumpled from stony to upset, shoulders slumping as his girlfriend leaned into his side, seeking comfort. "What? What is it?"

Fully worried now, Steve dragged her flush against his side and enveloped his arms around her as she took a series of sharp and short breaths, holding down sobs her body begged to release. In an attempt to soothe her, he rubbed her bicep and leg in a manner that was entirely non-sexual and came with solely comforting intentions.

"I'm just so tired Steve," she whimpered against his shirt, body slumping against his. "It feels like everything is building up and turning to shit and it's like I'm in a room that's constantly closing in on me."

Steve stayed silent as he listened, knowing that she would continue to

elaborate more and that pressuring her would only make her recoil back.

"I feel like my life is going nowhere, I work every day in a job that I hate just because we need the money but it feels like I'm no richer than when I started. I can't even remember the last time I got more than four hours of sleep."

"Why didn't you tell me you were having money problems? You know I would have helped you," he mumbled against the top of her head before pressing his cheek against it, squeezing her body tightly against his.

"I don't want pity," she responded gruffly, rubbing violently at her cheeks but remaining in the same position. "I just want to feel comfortable with money for the first time in my goddamn life. And it kills me that this is as far as I'll go, I can't even go to college to get a high-paying career. I'm going to be stuck like this for the rest of my life and everyone else will have moved on."

"You think I'd ever leave without you?" he leaned back to cock an eyebrow, moving his hands up to cup her cheeks. "If I'm going anywhere, I'm dragging your ass with me. You can't get rid of me that easy."

"Your mom will see to it that I'm out of the picture," she leaned backward out of his touch, grimacing further at the thought of his parent - who was hell bent on getting Steve to break up with her, for what reason, she was unaware.

"There's no one that could make me leave you," he hummed, leaning in and pressing a gentle kiss to the tip of her nose. "Well... maybe Phoebe Cates, but that's it!"

"You're so annoying," she couldn't help but laugh, leaning her head down until her locks fell around her face, shielding her features.

"I'll walk you home, come on," he stood up suddenly, dragging her onto her feet and leaning down to press a prolonged kiss to her lips - solidifying his feelings for her. Steve wasn't letting go of Ringo Wheeler, not without a fight at least. It pained him to see her at a

low point, but things would only get better from here. He'd make sure of it.

So Ringo's kind of reaching boiling point and she's ready to just IMplode soon. So while this chapter might seem slow, I've actually been hinting towards her deteriorating mental health for a while now and it was also heavily alluded to in the first book and I want this final hill in her character development before the monsters come!

I can't wait to get started on season 3! Also, can people please not post spoilers in the comments for a couple of days? I won't be able to finish the season yet because of work and I really don't want it ruined for me when I'm trying to avoid it!

Also, can anyone else BELIEVE that I predicted Robin was a lesbian and that she and Steve would tease each other all the time? It's a sign, Jessica bout to rock her world

RedVelvetPanPan - 10 out of 10 would die for Ben Waters

Vince Basile Jr - I think you'll like the next chapter if Steve x Ringo and Sunny moments is what you're after, but I hope you like this one too!

TacoPhoenix88 - Steve in this book has set my bar for boyfriends in real life SO FREAKIN HIGH. And a girls day is coming right up ;) I agree! Ben is a really grounding person and exactly what Ringo needs at the minute, I hope you liked this chapter and thank you for always being so kind and supportive!

candy95 - Ugh Steve's mom is such a bitch but at the same time I feel she's incredibly realistic, most people have encountered someone like her a few times! Ben and Sunny are such sweethearts I'm glad you like them!

Belladonna007 - I've been in her shoes as well where someone's mother is too judgemental of their kid's friends/partner based on their background and it's shite, karmas has got its kiss for Lily Harrington haha

Kelly - I've LOVED reading your reactions as you've caught up thanks so much for including me in your thought process as you read through! I hope you like what's to come! And as for ST3 I still haven't found out who the major character is that dies but I know for sure I'll die too if it's Steve

6. Silver Lining

"FOR ANYONE STILL ALIVE ON THIS SUNDAY MORNING-"

"It's Monday, technically," Nancy interjected over Ringo's broadcast, receiving a harsh glare as a result.

"Fine, this *Monday* morning," she corrected herself, pressing down harshly on the temperamental record button that connected her voice to the airwaves, "this is *Radio Ringo's* girl's night and I've been playing only music performed by women for the past hour. Of course if anyone has a problem with that, you can respectfully grow up. My name is 'Ringo', you think you've got problems? This is *Do You Wanna Touch Me* by Joan Jett."

The second her index fingertip lifted from the microphone as another record began to play in place of her voice, the other occupants of the room dissolved into giggles. As she had promised Hopper, Ringo had taken it upon herself to turn the booth into a makeshift den where they had donned their pyjamas and gathered an abundance of candy. The night was originally intended to take El's attention off Mike, even if temporarily, but it turned out to be the girl time she sorely needed.

"How come you didn't let me invite Robin?" Nancy directed towards Jessica with a gasp, suddenly remembering the wide eyes their friend had thrown the Wheeler girl earlier when she suggested inviting their newest addition.

"She was a little weird around me last night, okay?" The brunette shrugged passively, avoiding the direct gazes of all the girls in the room.

"Why?" Nancy probed, tucking her knees into her chest and resting her chin on top.

"I don't know, I guess she finds it weird having a lesbian friend," Jessica rolled her eyes, although the offence was evident in her demeanour. "Last night, she didn't have a ride home because her mom's car broke down so I said she could stay the night and she got really weird. Her face went as red as Harrington's busted-ass eye

socket when Billy laid him one, and she started rambling about how she was needed back home to dry the dishes."

There was a beat of silence where Nancy and Ringo met eyes, although it didn't last long when they quickly evaporated into a fit of raucous laughter. Ringo fanned her face as she tried to stop herself and explain the sudden amusement, but every time she attempted to speak it only erupted into another howl.

"Jessica," she finally managed to say, "you dumbass. Robin's a full blown lesbian, she's not homophobic."

"*What?*" she demanded with wide eyes, eyebrows furrowing as she looked between the two desperately for confirmation. "Why didn't you *say* anything? I thought she was just another straight girl I was wasting my time thinking about!"

"So you *are* thinking about her!" Perhaps over-dramatically, Ringo shot up with a finger poised in the air and a wide grin setting upon her lips.

"I'm so confused," El voiced, adorably resting her chin in her hands and looking between the older girls with innocently wide eyes. "What's a full blown lesbian?"

"It's girls that like other girls," Max tried to explain, while Sunny was staring at the strange girl in curiosity. Eleven was peculiar, no doubt - she possessed a quiet intelligence that suggested she wasn't dumb but a naivety that left her wondering if the girl had ever been outside.

"Well I like you, am I lesbian?" Eleven reeled in bafflement, darting her eyes back and forth between everyone for an explanation.

"No not just *like*," Sunny intervened, attempting to try her hand at explaining. "It's like... *like like*."

"Like?"

"Like."

"Oh my god, stop saying like," Ringo deadpanned, shoving a handful of M&Ms into her agape mouth as she stood to change the next track

before any dead air could occur. "Jessica, explain to the girl what the heck you are."

"The way that you feel about Mike, is the way I feel about girls," Jessica offered, hoping that it would sink into her somehow. It was too late into the night to delve into the intricacies of sexuality just yet.

"Oh," she simply replied, nodding a little to show that she was beginning to grasp what was happening. Max and Nancy smiled with pity at the girl, knowing well that she would get the chance to catch up to society eventually. But with not attending school and spending all of her time with Mike, her circumstances were only delaying that progress.

Ringo trailed back to their circle of beanbags and throw pillows as Blondie's *One Way or Another* began to sound in the background, fighting the urge to fall asleep against the comfortable cushions. Her erratic sleep schedule would never be something she'd grow accustomed to.

"Boy trouble," Sunny tsked, finally speaking more regularly now that she was becoming comfortable with the approximate group. "Can't relate."

"There isn't anyone that's caught your eye since you came here?" Max raised an eyebrow knowingly, leaning onto one elbow nearest to Ringo and taking a pretzel being offered to her by the same blonde.

"Are you kidding? There's no one in this town worth looking at. I'm saving myself for Harrison Ford."

"He's a little old for you isn't he?" Ringo pointed out, smirking with amusement.

"And you're too old to still have your mom wash your underwear, but that's your business," Sunny fired back, causing Eleven and Max to dissolve into a fit of giggles and the recipient of her comment to roll her eyes.

"I can't wait until Dustin comes back, at least someone around here

kisses my ass."

The next day had proved to be one of the worst Ringo had suffered since the beginning of the year. Waking up with a killer migraine was bad enough, but Charlie had seemed to wake up on the wrong side of the pervert bed that morning, and was more unforgiving than ever before with his advances on his young employee.

Knowing his co-worker was at breaking point, Ben gently tapped the blonde on her shoulder to get her to turn around from the shelves she was currently panic-stocking. Once she saw that it was only Ben, she visibly relaxed and forced a small smile out of politeness.

"I know you're having a horrible day," he began, offering up the tub of ice-cream he was holding that she hadn't noticed, "so I drove to Scoops on my lunch break and asked your boyfriend what your favourite ice-cream flavour was."

"Ben," Ringo whined, eyes threatening to tear up by his kind and genuine gesture. As horrible as working at Charlie's was, forming a friendship with Ben Waters was proving to be a true silver lining. "You're literally my favourite person, I hope you know that."

"I just feel so bad that he's treating you like crap today, it should be me or at least the two of us," he smiled sympathetically, offering the tub towards her which she gratefully accepted. Ringo dug her spoon into the bubblegum goodness and allowed herself to smile genuinely, for the first time since waking up.

"*Ringo!*" A voice suddenly bellowed from the back room, causing the woman in question to scramble in returning the ice-cream to Ben and scamper back towards Charlie, all traces of contentment leaving her with a single call of her name. With a sheepish expression, she stepped around the door frame with a slump in her shoulders, already begging for the interaction to be over. From the tone of his call, she guessed he was about to yell.

"Can you tell me what possessed you to place the multi-pack of canned pineapple on top of the boxes of pasta?" he inquired with a sarcastic but harsh undertone, standing next to the tins which had

fallen from the lack of support and busted a few of the cans, dragging the pasta with it and spilling the shells along the floor.

"I didn't realise, I'm sorry," she stammered, entirely intimidated by his demeanour. Charlie may have been slimy, but he was also much taller than the blonde and held a wrath like no other when he was angry. "I was rushing to get the delivery stock out..."

"This is coming out of your paycheck, I won't lose a dime because of your own stupidity," he continued to rant, all but throwing the mop at her to clean up the mess of pineapple juices.

"It's only three cans," Ringo murmured under her breath, wincing when he snapped his head up - obviously hearing her comment.

"And you were only hired because of your looks, so why don't you do what most women should be doing and clean up your goddamn mess!" His final comment ended in a booming shout as he stormed past her with a breeze, leaving her shaken and frozen where she stood. Perhaps it was the fact she was constantly exhausted and terribly run down, or maybe it was the way she had no choice but to put up with his bullshit because of their money problems. Either way, Ringo couldn't help but feel more pathetic than ever as her body began to shake with quiet sobs, tears flowing freely from her eyes.

Sniffing as she bent down to lift the damaged cans, Ringo sniffed lowly and quickly swiped the wetness from her cheeks as the sound of footsteps were heard from behind her. It was Ben, most likely, but she didn't even want him to see her cry over her circumstances. Even if he was the nicest guy in the world.

"Come on," Ben whispered quietly, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder as he crouched next to her. "I'll clean this mess up, why don't you go home?"

"I can't go home, I'll get fired," she muttered in reply, breaking into a fresh course of sobs halfway through her words. The teenager felt a wave of pity for the girl as her lower lip shook with emotion, but he had stood by too long to let it continue without at least trying to help.

"Look, you know you can't keep this up any longer," he started, using his grip on her shoulder to encourage Ringo to stand. The blonde rubbed her cheeks once more with the back of her hands, but any dampness immediately returned with fresh tears streaming. "I'm worried for you and what will happen if you keep going the way you're going. Please, please, go home. Or go to your friends, or your boyfriend."

"But I need the money-" she tried to protest, wiping her nose with her sleeve but looking as if she was truly contemplating his words.

"Find another job," he encouraged, squeezing her arm once more. "You're a smart girl, you'll do better than this."

Ringo paused for a few minutes, her friend waiting patiently for her to come to a conclusion as she chewed harshly on her lower lip in quiet contemplation. She knew he was right - the emotional toll her lack of sleep and disregard for her physical well-being was directly impacting her mental health, and she couldn't begin to imagine how it would be to spend even another month going the way she was.

"Okay," she nodded finally, stepping forward and gripping onto the small boy with all her might. Her time at Charlie's Convenience Store was ending, but her friendship with Ben Waters wasn't. "Thank you, Ben."

"You're welcome," he beamed with pride, thankful to himself that he had managed to make a difference. "Now skid-daddle, before he comes back and I have to restrain him."

Through her crying, she managed a small chuckle at his words - knowing well that Ben couldn't restrain a wet blanket, but he'd have tried anyway. Tucking her hair behind her ears, she handed the mop over to him and had to stop herself from sprinting towards the exit. There was only one person who could have made her feel better at that moment, and he had luckily just finished his shift at Scoops Ahoy.

Ringo bounded up the walkway to the Harrington residence with sheer determination, and would have sprinted if it wouldn't have set

their neighbours paranoid. Her crying didn't cease when she walked out the door of Charlie's, if anything she grew to regret the decision even more once she was allowed a moment to think of the consequences. The thought of disappointing her mother, who was fighting to provide for both herself and her foster sister, was too much to bear.

The door couldn't have come fast enough within her reach, nor the doorbell have rang loud enough. But when she finally heard the telltale click of the door unlocking the relieved smile she was finally starting to settle in dissipated the second she saw a blonde head of hair sitting atop a woman's face, instead of the luscious mane of hair her boyfriend had styled to perfection.

"Mrs Harrington," she greeted before swallowing nervously, shoulders slumping with disappointment. She hadn't seen Steve's unbearable mother since the horrific lunch at La Lumiere, and if it were up to her, would choose to never see her again. "Is he here?"

"Ringo," the lady nodded in return, crossing her arms defensively, "he's not back yet. But now that you're here, let's have a chat."

The so-called 'chat' being suggested seemed a lot less friendly than one would anticipate once the elder woman stepped out onto the porch and shut the door behind her, instead of offering to invite her inside.

"Please, I've had a horrific day," Ringo pleaded, closing her eyes with exhaustion for a moment, "just don't do this today. Please."

"You haven't visited the house since our lunch, Heavens know when I'll get the chance to say this - because I'm only going to say it once. You know that I disapprove of you dating my son."

"And you know that I think you're a stuck-up bitch?" Ringo snapped back, having had enough of people talking down to her for one day. She'd surely come to regret her comment, especially given the 'I-told-you-so' eyebrow that she was now receiving.

"And that's why. If you truly loved my son as you claimed to, you would never have disrespected his mother like just now. My son was

never perfect, but since he has started dating you he has dropped his plans for college to work in an ice-cream parlour, stopped talking to friends that he has known since the first grade and spends all his time doting over a girl that has absolutely no plans in life."

"I-" she cut herself off, a familiar lump forming in her throat. "I have plans... Steve is a big boy he made those decisions by himself."

"Steve is just that - a boy," Mrs Harrington scowled, a sneer on her expression and in her voice. "I, more than anyone, know that boys will follow a girl they like to the ends of the Earth. And he likes you, so I can't convince him to leave this detrimental relationship and focus on his future. But I can get through to you - because I know you like him too. If you truly liked him, you'd end this relationship and realise that you're only bringing him down."

Ringo stayed silent after the woman's speech, lower lip once more quivering as a warning sign to the flood of tears that were about to overflow her cheeks once again. It truly was a terrible day.

"I've heard about your reputation, I'm sure you'll remember a boy named Daniel Ashford? His mother, Violet, is a rather close friend of mine. And she told me a rather interesting tale of how you took photos of yourself completely naked, and then had the audacity to assault her son when he mentioned it to you. Do you really think you're the kind of girl that anyone would want around their child?"

"No-" her voice broke, much to her own horror as the building cries rose further to the surface, "it wasn't like that!"

Steve's mother didn't have to respond, her point had already come across loud and clear. In a world of worry and panic that Ringo had already found herself in that day, the sensation of realisation once she considered the words being churned over her settled like a sheet of ice around her back. The blonde had always believed it was too good to be true - that a relationship like the one she shared with Steve Harrington would last with someone like her. Try as she did to break her flaws, Ringo Wheeler was still the trailer park girl that nobody liked in Florida, the only girl she knew that wasn't going to college and quite simply, not good enough for someone like him.

"Well," she sniffed, bloodshot eyes lining with a film of water as she prepared to turn and dash straight for her car, "you can tell him yourself that it's done. I'm sure you'll enjoy it."

With those final words, Ringo turned and sprinted this time - neighbours be damned, straight for her yellow Beetle, where she planned to sit inside and bawl her eyes out for the remainder of the day whilst listening to *With Or Without You* on repeat.

As Lily Harrington watched the blonde depart from their street, she didn't feel as happy as Ringo would have thought. Satisfied with the outcome, perhaps - but not altogether ecstatic. It wasn't the girls fault that she was raised in the manner that she was. Having stood for so long, almost expecting the hideously-coloured Volkswagon to make a reappearance, she jumped when the door suddenly opened behind her and plastered on her best grin to save face.

"Steve, honey," she greeted, ignoring his skeptical gaze and stepping back over the threshold of their front door, "where shall we go for dinner?"

"Who was at the door? I was in the toilet," he demanded, furrowing his brows. He knew his mother's fake-smile anywhere, but usually she used it on people she met in the grocery store and not her own son.

"That was Ringo actually, honey," her tone dropped as her smile did, morphing into one of false pity that instantly set off alarm bells inside his head. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart, she told me to tell you she couldn't do it any longer. She didn't have the heart to say it to your face, so when I answered the door she asked me to."

"Mom," Steve deadpanned, a look of disbelief etched across his face, "Ringo once told me she'd rather change her name to Boob McTitfuck than ever break up with me without a reason. What the hell did you say?" Storming past his mother with a look of contempt, Steve felt the pockets of his Scoops Ahoy uniform shorts to make sure his car keys were still on his person as he darted towards his vehicle before she could travel far.

"Enough of this Steve," she called out in warning, eyes narrowing with frustration, "I've let this go on long enough. That girl is no good

for you, and I'm not letting you run after her like a puppy dog any longer."

"You know what?" he raised an eyebrow, slamming shut the door of his BMW to point an accusatory finger at his mother. "I'm sorry mom, I love you but where were you when I started receiving college rejection letters? Or when I needed help studying for tests I was going to fail? Or when my friends all turned on me because of who I hung out with? Because she was there. For all of that. You don't get the right to tell me who isn't good for me, not when she's the only person who *has* been good to me."

Leaving his mother flabbergasted on their porch, Steve clambered into the car hurriedly - hissing when he banged his shin bone on the door. It took him multiple tries to start the car, mainly because the keys kept falling from his fiddling fingers, but when he finally managed to pull out of the drive he set off in the direction for her apartment. If she truly wanted to break up, she was going to have to listen to what he had to say first.

"Fucking piece of fucking *shit*!" Ringo Wheeler screeched as she kicked her foot against the newly deflated wheel of her car, having popped moments before and nearly sending her off the road. Hopper had warned her months before to learn how to change a tyre, but she never thought it'd happen in the middle of a derelict road on one of the worst days of her life.

The burst rubber had only one benefit - the shock of it had stopped her from crying temporarily before her cheeks practically dissolved. Instead of sorrow, frustration and anger was beginning to take over. Both with herself and with the cards God had dealt her that day.

Placing her hands against the top of the car, Ringo hung her head and tried to inhale shakily, desperate to calm herself. Her breathing quickly turned into a sigh of relief once she heard a car slowing to stop next to her, although knowing her luck that day she'd sooner bet it was Michael Myers than someone who wanted to help.

The person she met eyes with was decidedly worse than the infamous serial killer.

Steve stayed quiet once he exited the car, gaze full of concern and stopping himself from darting straight for her once he saw the swollen skin around her eyes and the dishevelled mess her hair had become, suggesting she was tugging on it in the midst of her cries.

"I don't know what she said to you," he began carefully, taking a slow step towards her but hanging back enough to avoid sending her off. "But it's not true. You know that it's not."

"Everything's just gone to shit Steve," she whimpered, throwing her hands in the air with exasperation. "You deserve better than me, I'm a complete mess. We both know it."

"If you're a mess, then what am I? I barely have my shit together, Ringo, it doesn't mean you have to leave me because of it. You know that I don't care about any of the stuff my mom does."

"That's exactly it!" She shook her head, "you *should* care! We're not going to be one of those cheesy movie couples that date each other to piss their parents off! My mom is the only thing I have left in the world, I know how good it is to have a relationship with your mom and I'm not getting in the way of that."

"Ringo," he lowered his voice, his eyes pleading with hers to listen to him and believe his words. "*You're* my family."

And just like that, Steve reminded Ringo just why she ran to his house in the direct place. She didn't need a man to make her happy, but she needed Steve to remind her of the reasons she had to *be* happy. It took all her will power not to just fall into his arms then and there, the shame of leaving his house so dramatically weighing heavily on her shoulders.

"In a... like, non-incestuous way because I've stuck my dick in you before."

Against her own dark thoughts, Ringo chuckled, hanging her head in shame at her decision to ever even think of leaving the absolute enigma that was Steve Harrington. And maybe she wasn't good enough, but even so - he loved her nonetheless.

"Now stop being silly," he hummed, closing the gap between them with several long strides and gathering her into his arms within seconds. Mumbling apologies into his neck, Ringo wound her arms around his shoulders and hid her face from the world as he lifted her up until her feet dangled off the ground.

"Shhh," he shushed, using one hand to stroke the back of her tousled blonde locks, "it's alright. I forgive you for leaving me, even though I'm an absolute sex god and you would have ran back to me anyway."

"I love you," she giggled through what would be her final wave of tears for that day, leaning back in his arms to see his face. He held no essence of contempt or annoyance in his expression, only sheer, unadulterated love for the girl in his arms.

"And I lke you."

I had y'all fooled but Steve and Ringo would never break up for longer than five minutes tbh, and now ONTO SEASON 3. This part of the story was really important to me to write because I want everyone who's going through a rut like Ringo to know that it will stop eventually, and things will start to turn around for the better!

Vince Basile Jr - I hope you liked this chapter, it's my favourite of the book so far!

candy95 - Ringo still has so much character development left to do and that's why I decided on a sequel! And also because I love writing her and Steve hahaha

StardustIsMagic - omg I can't believe you binged the story that quickly, thanks so much and I hope you enjoyed it thus far! As for LGBTQ and POC rep, it was really important for me to include characters that fall into either one or both categories and be a genuine strong character. I feel like I've barely read stories with queer representation, never mind one with a strong black lesbian woman like Jessica, so there's no need to thank me! 3 I hope you enjoy this chapter and thanks so much for commenting x

youngbones7 - no bless YOU for being so kind and taking the time to

read the story! I would never put Stingo through worse than this chapter tbh they're too pure! Thank you so much and have a lovely day x

TacoPhoenix88 - I always look forward to reviews and thoughts, thank you for always sharing your opinions on the book! I hope you liked this chapter, it's my favourite of the sequel so far!

Kelly - It's a very relatable situation for me personally and I really wanted to get across those experiences in this book, because Ringo's character development in the first book left a lot of room for how she copes with being the poorest among her friends and how she lets things build up. Robin being a lesbian was honestly such an incredible coincidence, I like to think it was gaydar because I'm bisexual but I also really just wanted a woman that was worthy of Jessica and Robin is amazing! It's kinda funny to me how the show straight baited everyone ahaha. the second I watched ST3 I made notes of all the scenes and places Ringo could fit into and I can't wait to write it to be honest, it's my favourite season so far! Thanks so much for reviewing!

7. Ski Pants in Summer

JULIA WHEELER WOULD BE THE FIRST TO ADMIT SHE HAD MADE MISTAKES. Mistakes in raising her daughter, that was. Thinking of how unsupportive she had been two years before when Ringo had first been sent to Indiana left her feeling heavy with shame. The guilt would likely never leave her, but she would spend the rest of her days as a mother ensuring her first-born knew just how loved she was.

Unlike the Wheelers, including Ringo's late father, Julia hadn't originated from a suburban middle-class background. The fact they were on the lower spectrum of the economic scale wasn't something new to her - Julia was from the proverbial 'wrong side of the tracks' from the get-go. And when someone hurt a family member on that side of the tracks, it didn't slip by without consequences. Charlie Lincolnshire - the titled owner of Charlie's Convenience Store, was about to realise that today.

"You!" Julia called out the second she stepped through the doors to the empty store, prompting the young boy manning the till to jump a mile into the air in fright. "Get the owner."

"Aren't you R-Ringo's mom?" Ben inquired, nervous by her attitude but relaxing slightly as he began to notice how eerily similar they looked.

"You bet your ass," Julia announced proudly, placing her hands on the counter and waiting until the teenager fetched her target of the hour as he disappeared through the back room and reappeared with a middle-aged man she didn't quite recognise.

"Is there a problem?" He questioned, raising an eyebrow and eyeing her carefully.

"What kind of asshole shouts at a girl the way you did to Ringo?" She demanded, feeling very much like Karen Wheeler complaining to the manager about inappropriate service - every cliché about middle-class mothers rolled into a single person. "You have no right to even look at my daughter wrong, much less insult her the way you did for

the sake of a couple cans of pineapple."

"I don't know what your *daughter* told you," he sneered, squaring off his shoulders to appear taller and look down upon her, "but I never raised my voice. If anything, I gave Ringo special treatment because she seemed a little stressed out. So whatever she told you is obviously an excuse to cover up the fact she was too lazy to work hard for a living."

"Are you trying to suggest that my daughter is a liar?" She recoiled, eyes wide with offence and fists balled by her side. Julia was a matured woman - for the most part. But offend her family or loved ones and she suddenly became the sixteen year old girl who beat up boys that made her friends cry, or pranked the girls that smack-talked her family.

"If that's the conclusion you want to draw," he shrugged uncaringly, crossing his arms over his chest.

"*You're* the liar," a quiet voice sounded out from next to them, so low they wouldn't have heard it had there been any sound other than their heavy breathing. Confused by his sudden input, Charlie reeled to glare at Ben with a vicious stare, daring him to speak again.

"What did you just say to me?" Charlie scoffed, his piercing gaze causing the boy's face to redden fiercely with embarrassment. Julia debated internally about defending him, but she barely knew him - only guessing that it was the famous Ben Waters that Ringo occasionally mentioned.

"I just..." he trailed off, clearing his throat and swallowing in an attempt to lessen his stutters. "I was there. You were horrible to her."

Satisfied that she had been proven right, Julia returned to face the store manager with a smirk - the manager that was so angry steam practically emerged from his ears.

"You might want to remember who you're talking to-"

"I quit," Ben yelped, half-sprinting around the till to reach safety in fear of Charlie breaking completely and actually lashing out at him.

"You're screwed now," Julia shrugged, welcoming the teenage boy by her side with a proud nod. "I'm friends with Karen Wheeler, everyone in town will know how much of a sleazebag you are before noon and then your business will go from five feet under, to halfway to China."

As she prepared to storm out with an over-dramatic exit, the front entrance swung open as ferociously as she had pushed it herself. Although instead of a protective mother barging through, in came Steve Harrington - finger poised in the air and an expression contorted with annoyance.

"I have a bone to pick with you, Mr Big Man!" Steve shouted through the building, too focused on the older man to even notice Julia and Ben standing mere feet away.

"Steve," Julia called out, marching up to his side and ushering him out. "It's already done. You missed it. I handled it."

"*What?*" He groaned in annoyance, disappointed that he had missed the opportunity to give Ringo's former manager a piece of his mind. His girlfriend had spent the night before pouring her heart out to Steve about all of her troubles, before eventually sleeping in his backseat until the time came for her next radio show. Her presence meant that he couldn't find the chance to march up to the person who was partially the reason for her tears, but now that Ringo was spending the day with Jessica - he had the time.

"But I had so many insults planned," Steve continued to rant as they made their way toward their respective vehicles. "Like, 'you need to yell at Ringo to get over the fact the last person you slept with was a hole in your mattress'."

"And this is the man I trust my daughter with," the blonde sighed, shaking her head but respectfully clapping him nonetheless. As much as she teased him, she would trust him with her daughter's life any day.

"Okay, so when we walk in," Jessica muttered anxiously, insecurely flicking her hair over her shoulders as she strolled alongside Ringo through Starcourt mall, "should I say 'hey, Robin!' or will I just

pretend I didn't see her?"

"Pretend you didn't see her?" Ringo scoffed in amusement, giving her an incredulous glance. "What are you, thirteen? Go in there and go straight to her!"

"You're just saying that so you and Harrington can make out in the back room," Jessica rolled her eyes, straightening her denim jacket as they finally reached the ice-cream parlour. Their 'girl's day' had been massively consumed by the utmost of meticulous planning and scheming, all in a bid to set Jessica and Robin up in what Ringo believed would be the 'lesbian Bonnie and Clyde, but stealing ice-cream scoops instead of cash'.

Out of fairness to Jessica, she wasn't entirely wrong - within five minutes Ringo and Steve had sneaked into the back room to give the stock freezers a sight they'd never forget. Perhaps it was for the best, as it gave the two girls a chance to talk and get over the initial awkwardness after the events that transpired the weekend before. The girl felt as if she should act different around Robin now after finding out about her sexuality, but remembered how much she herself would hate it if the tables were turned. It was all she could do to stop herself from screaming *'I'm gay too!'*

The vibe in the back room was entirely different - with the couple in the midst of a steamy make out session with Ringo sitting on top of the table and Steve standing between her legs. If the *Scoops* manager happened to walk in while they were in such a compromising position, Steve would surely say goodbye to his hat and sailor-like uniform for life.

"Wait-" Steve broke away from her lips suddenly, eyes narrowed in confusion as he tilted his head like a puppy to listen for something.

"Nope," she snickered, gripping his chin and using her hold to pucker his lips like a fish, before promptly returning her mouth to his. Robin's voice could be heard in the distance, but the blonde simply assumed she was serving yet another customer.

"No- wait!" Steve snapped back again, body on high alert as he seemed to hear something she couldn't.

"Is he here?" A muffled voice travelled through the wall, prompting Steve to grin frantically and practically shove Ringo backward to release her hold on him as he sprinted towards the door.

"Jesus!" Ringo shouted in protest, splayed out across the table from his over-excited push. Judging by his reaction, there was only one person that could have strolled into *Scoops Ahoy* that would elicit such a response. And while she too was excited at the prospect of seeing Dustin again, Ringo wouldn't have discarded Steve like an empty wrapper - at least, not before thirty seconds ago.

"Henderson!" Steve's shout rang out as he skidded to race through the door, gleefully cheering before rushing toward his younger friend.

"Cock blocked by a kid and I'm not even a parent yet," Ringo ranted inwardly, huffing as she hopped off of the table and trailed back to the front of the shop. "I don't believe this bullshit."

By the time she had returned to the till, Steve and Dustin had just completed their ridiculously meticulous routine that involved mimicking light-sabres and a dramatic death scene.

"Ringo!" Dustin bellowed, practically trotting towards the blonde with his arms outstretched. Rolling her eyes but already enjoying his presence once again, Ringo bent over and met his hug with equal ferocity. As strange as it was that they were friends with young teenagers, she couldn't deny they were some of the best friends she had ever had.

"Hey Henderson," she greeted, patting the top of his head.

"I'm sorry to break your heart, Ringo," he grimaced suddenly, leaving her baffled. "I've met someone else. What we had will always be special to me, but I can't keep waiting for you forever."

"Um..." she narrowed her eyes, curling her lips inward to prevent a laugh escaping. "I'm heartbroken, truly. But I respect your decision."

"I'm glad we could be mature about this," he smiled as he placed his hand on her bicep comfortingly. Over the top of his cap, Ringo met Steve's eyes as he hid his laughter behind the palm of his hand,

guffawing against the skin before lifting the large banana split he had asked Robin to make for his young friend.

"Come on kiddo," Steve called out as he trailed towards a nearby booth, "sit down and tell me all about the new Ringo."

"No way, hotter than Phoebe Cates?" Steve reacted with surprise, face beaming with pride as Dustin described the young girl that had finally managed to shift his attentions away from his girlfriend.

"Yep, and *brilliant* too!" Dustin marvelled, "she doesn't even care that my real pearls are still coming in. She says kissing is better *without* teeth."

"Well that's reassuring to hear for the next time Steve inevitably gets his ass beat," Ringo nodded, her eyebrows raised comically high as she was far less believing of Dustin's description of the mystical 'Suzie' than her partner. Teenagers who often struggled in finding a significant other often turned to imaginary tales from their time away, and it appeared Dustin would be no different.

"Wow!" Steve stuttered, finally realising the likely falsehood behind Dustin's story. "That's- that's great man, it's kinda romantic!"

"So what's going on there?" Dustin asked suddenly, nodding toward Jessica and Robin who were still in the same position, talking animatedly.

"The classic tale of two lesbians who are too shy to tell the other about their feelings," Ringo recanted dramatically, unaware that the volume of her voice had been high enough for the two in question to hear. Robin flushed a dark red as she turned from the counter she had been leaning against, finding something to do in the form of sweeping the floor with a nearby broom. Jessica, instead, had slowly turned to her blonde friend with furious eyes.

"Okay, I know you're not talking about *my* situation when you're dating Heather Locklear over there," Jessica drily commented as she crossed her arms over her chest.

"You're talking smack to me when you're wearing ski pants in Summer?" Ringo bantered in return, a grin of amusement across her lips while Steve silently scoffed in offence. "What the hell are you skiing down? Your lady boner?"

"Yes, actually! I'm riding down my lady boner all the way to your mom's front door!"

"I've missed you guys," Dustin managed to say in between laughs, his curls jittering as his body shook with laughter.

"Where are the other knuckleheads anyway?" Steve questioned as Jessica slid towards them and slipped into the booth to sit next to Ringo.

"They ditched me yesterday," Dustin grumbled, expression contorting with annoyance. "First day back, can you believe that shit?"

"Woah, seriously?" Steve recoiled, as surprised as the blonde next to him. Although admittedly, the elder teenagers could see it coming. Not every group of friends managed to make it past the 'girls' stage, but they hoped these kids wouldn't fall into that trope.

"They're gonna regret it though, big time," Dustin threatened, "when they don't get to share in my glory."

"What are you talking about?" Ringo curiously demanded after nodding goodbye to Jessica as she left the table with the intention of going shopping.

"So last night," he began, eyes darting between Steve and Ringo both, "I was trying to get in contact with Suzie." At the mention of his seemingly fake girlfriend, they hummed in agreement, but not before giving each other a suggestive glance that confirmed neither believed the infamous Suzie was any more real than Ringo's knockoff Doc Martens.

"And I-" he cut off, anxiously glancing around for anyone listening in before mumbling something entirely incoherent.

"You slept with a secret space station?" Ringo echoed, eyes narrowing as she struggled to hear him. "Oh, you got that Lego Death Star, after

all?"

"No!" Dustin rolled his eyes, covering his mouth to mutter again at the same volume as before.

"Okay," Steve sighed, "just speak louder-"

"I intercepted a secret Russian communication!" He yelled all of a sudden, making sure that both the duo and the entire ice-cream parlour also heard.

"Jesus," a new voice was heard, the trio's heads turning to see Sunny standing by the table with an unbothered expression. "I chose the right time to join in."

"What's up?" Ringo greeted, although she was itching to return to Dustin to hear whatever lie he was about to tell next.

"Can we talk?" Sunny nodded towards an empty booth nearby, signalling the need for privacy. Meeting Steve's curious glance head on, the blonde hummed in agreement before slipping out, hoping that her boyfriend would remember everything to fill her in afterward.

"By the way your mom said your boss at the radio station called and wants to talk to you," Sunny revealed, leaving her companion to flop her head backward in exasperation.

"Knowing my luck lately I'm about to get fired from there too," she groaned, squeezing the part of her nose in between her eyes and sighing exasperatedly.

"Look," she started, reaching into her backpack for a brown envelope, "I'm not one for sappy crap so let's not do that. But I've been saving money for a few years now for when I'm eighteen. Kinda assumed that I'd be dumped on my ass once I'm too old to foster. But you and your mom have been kinda nice to me and you're struggling, so here."

Much to Ringo's shock, the black haired teenager passed the brown envelope across the table to her nonchalantly. Immediately thereafter, she felt guilt that the girl would even think to part with her savings on their behalf. But as desperate as Ringo and Julia were,

she wouldn't have taken it for a million years. Depriving Sunny of her savings would only mean that the girl would be in a worse off situation than them, although she secretly hoped that she would be with them for the foreseeable future and decide to stay once turning eighteen. There was little doubt that Julia would allow her to.

"You're low-key a big softie, aren't you?" Ringo pointed out knowingly, her heart full for the fostered sister beside her. "Thank you, sweetie, but no thank you. We'll work it out, we always do."

Seemingly embarrassed by the refusal, Sunny retracted the envelope and stuffed it back into her bag, avoiding all eye contact with Ringo. But the blonde wouldn't settle for an awkward silence after such a kind-hearted gesture, and wrapped her longer arms around the teenager's shoulders to pull her in for a side hug.

Once their moment was over, Ringo offered to buy the girl an ice-cream out of respect - which Sunny didn't need to be asked twice about. Chuckling as she approached Robin, she suddenly remembered her mother's notice about her boss back at Hawkins FM.

"By the way, Robin," she called out as the worker busied herself making the sundae, "can I use the phone?"

Once settled in the back room with *Scoops Ahoy's* landline in hand, Ringo squeezed her eyes shut as the sound of dialling met her ear, saying a silent prayer that she wasn't about to lose the only source of income she had - and from a job she liked at that.

"Hello?"

"Hey! It's Ringo!" She squeaked nervously, chewing her lower lip like a dog would a bone.

"Ah, Ringo," Hal cleared his throat, tone of voice hard to decipher just yet. "I've been looking to get in contact with you."

"I've been told, is there something wrong?"

This was it. This would be the final nail in her financial coffin that would send her mother and herself spiralling and scrambling for every last possible penny they could get. *Radio Ringo* would be

nothing more than a mere memory in her own mind, and she'd be forced to beg for her job back with Charlie just to save them from a financial pit.

"Quite the opposite actually," he exclaimed down the line. "The station's owner as you know is a big wig from Indiana, he was driving late one night and heard your show. He loved your radio personality and song choices so much, he has requested that we move your slot to an earlier time so he can listen daily."

If she had been sipping water, Ringo would not only have spat it out - but choked on it until she coughed up a lung and died from sheer bad luck. There was no way that her recent downturn would reel its head around and become a blessing out of nowhere, things like that just didn't work for girls like Ringo.

"Hello..?" He prompted, snapping the blonde back to reality and into realising that she hadn't answered him in quite some time.

"Yes! Sorry, I'm here! Are you sure he was talking about me?"

"Let's be honest how many Ringos are there in the world?" Hal guffawed at his own joke, which wasn't even altogether that funny but left the blonde screaming with laughter if it meant she'd further impress him. "You'll be cut back down to an hour slot, but you'll now be playing between the hours of 6pm and 7pm. A lot more doable than the night shift, isn't it?"

After further discussion and an inevitable acceptance from Ringo herself, she hung up the phone and immediately dissolved into a string of loud cheers and air-punching.

"Yes!" She howled. "*Fucking hell yes!*"

The door to the back room suddenly slammed open, revealing a curious looking Steve and Dustin as their eyes searched the room for the cause of her elation.

"Jesus, I thought you were cheating on me in here," Steve sighed in relief, dropping a red book onto the table and crossing the room.

"If I was, I wouldn't do it so close to you," she beamed with

happiness, rolling onto her tip toes and placing a kiss to his lips.

"Enough with the PDA, I get it - you're sexually attracted to each other," Dustin rolled his eyes, picking up the item that Steve dropped to hold it up for her to see. "We have work to do."

Splashed across the front of the book were the words 'RUSSIAN-ENGLISH DICTIONARY', and it was at that moment Ringo realised her news would be nowhere near as entertaining as the tale Dustin was about to spin for her.

Finally an update and things are starting to come together for Ringo!

I hope everyone enjoys this chapter 3

Vince Basile Jr - I had everyone fooled ahahah

NicoleR85 - so glad you like the story! I hope you enjoy what's coming up! x

Guest - Ugh same you have no idea. Ringo and Steve are way too grown and mature and in love to let stupid crap break them up properly.

RedVelvetPanPan - Well hey at least you don't have to pay for this type of cocaine!

A Star Rewriter - I have a lot of big ideas that I can't wait to write for season 3, thanks so much for reading this far and I hope you'll like it!

Guest - I hope your funk ends soon and that everything is okay! Have a wonderful day x

Flowerchild - Ahhh I'm so glad you like them together! Season 3 is slowly but surely getting there!

Belladonna007 - I've honestly set my own standards for men SO HIGH by writing a character like Steve, I hate myself haha. But I think that's exactly what they've become to each other, family! x

*Kelly - Between healthy relationships with friends and her boyfriend
I can't tell if I want to be Ringo or be WITH Ringo at this point!
Completely agree I'm staying single irl until someone meets Steve's
level of perfection I hate myself for writing him so damn cute
hahaha, hope you like this chapter!*

8. Blondes Die First

"I SWEAR YOU'VE PLAYED IT SO MANY TIMES I THINK I'M GETTING HYPNOTISED," Ringo ranted, flopping her head down onto the metal table from her seat next to Dustin. It took all of her inner strength not to grab the tape player and smash it into smithereens.

"Wait," Steve paused, halfway through chewing a bite of a banana, "what if it is hypnotising us to assassinate the president, or something?"

"Yes," Ringo responded in a dry tone, "because something about a radio presenter, an ice-cream server and a goddamn kid *screams* the next 'Lee Harvey Oswald'."

"Hey! I'm not a kid any more, because if I was that would make Suzie a pedophile," Dustin interjected, sighing in frustration as he reached for the player to rewind one again.

"Dustin," Ringo started after throwing a cautionary glance towards her boyfriend, "Suzie is someone that was at the actual camp, right? Not like... a supervisor, or anything - right?"

"Yes, that's gross!" He recoiled in disgust, giving her an incredulous glance. "Besides, our supervisor was toothless but I don't exactly think *she* had Cleidocranial Dysplasia. There was a rumour she kissed so many of the previous campers that her teeth fell out from all the shared spit."

"Wait, that can happen?" Steve demanded, eyes widened as he thought of his current record of previous kisses.

"Oh for god's sake, put the Russian back on that was at least somewhat understandable," the blonde ranted, leaning back in her seat and releasing a tired exhale as the droning voice started up again. Admittedly, her brain tuned out the latest run through - thoughts shifting from a threat to their homeland security to wondering if Jessica and Robin would ever happen, what her mother would cook for dinner and how good Steve hair looks the longer he

had been letting it grow. Even eating a banana, in a manner that was entirely messy and unattractive no less, her eyes fixated on him and a smirk fell on her lips as she admired the man she called her own.

Feeling eyes on him, Steve turned to meet her gaze with a quizzical expression at her staring - before opening his mouth wide to expose the chewed up pieces of banana smeared across his tongue. And just like that, the moment was ruined.

"The music at the end sounded familiar," he voiced, snapping her out of her daze and reminding Ringo where they were.

"Why are you listening to the music? We're supposed to be translating Russian!" Dustin yelled, pointing his hand angrily at the table. In fairness to the older duo in the room, Dustin should have known better than to come to Steve and Ringo for such a monumental task. They shared approximately one brain cell between them, or so Mike had speculated previously.

"I'm trying to listen to the Russian but there's mu-" Steve's defense was abruptly cut off by the door slamming open and an irritated Robin suddenly entering the room, Jessica close behind with a more amused expression.

"Alright babysitting time is over you need to get in there!" She greeted, pointing her scooper accusedly at Steve.

"I just thought I heard a manly voice speaking, and I thought - well that's not Steve, so I must investigate," Jessica shrugged playfully, eyeing the contents splayed across the table and the strange letters written across the small whiteboard.

"What could be more important than the two o'clock rush, Harrington? If I have to give Erica Sinclair one more free sample, it'll be swapped with rat poison," Robin huffed, eyeing the group suspiciously.

"I guarantee what we're doing is way more important than two o'clock rush," Dustin defended, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Yeah? And how do you know these Russians are up to no good

anyways?" She demanded, leaving the two boys open-mouthed and horrified that their plan had already been discovered by an outsider.

"How does she know about the Russians?" Dustin panicked, looking between Steve and Ringo with accusatory eyes.

"I don't know!" Steve muffled, mouth full of the remainder of his fruit.

"One of you told her!"

"Yeah, I told her," Ringo admitted non-nonchalantly. On cue, both pair of eyes darted towards her, filled with annoyance.

"You *what?*!" Steve and Dustin said, scarily simultaneously.

"It was when I left to get chips," Ringo frowned, as if confused by their frustrations. "She asked what was going on, so I said and I quote, 'evil Russians are invading, but don't worry because I've read Captain America and I've got this shit *down*.'"

"Hydra were Nazis, not Russians," Robin smirked smartly.

"So," Jessica intervened, carelessly lifting the dictionary and dropping it again, "you think you have evil Russians plotting against our country on tape and you're trying to translate but you didn't figure out a single word because you didn't realise they use an entirely different alphabet than we do."

"Sound about right?" Robin added, snickering at how the honey-skinned girl didn't pause for a breath once throughout her explanation. "So let us hear it, maybe I can help. I'm fluent in four languages, you know."

"If one of them is barking loudly at dogs and getting excited when they bark back, I've been told that doesn't count," Ringo commented with a dejected smile just as Dustin asked 'Russian?'

In response, Robin let out a string of words in a foreign language completely unknown to their ears, leaving the trio excitedly cheering in thinking they had located a translator.

"That was Pig Latin, dingus," she revealed, reveling in the newfound disappointment across their faces.

"Atthay asway oodgay," Jessica sounded out, confusing them even more but leaving Robin beaming at whatever she had said.

"Anyway," she continued after darting her eyes away from Jessica's and leaving Ringo and Steve smirking at the obvious chemistry between them, "I can speak Spanish, and French and Italian and I've been in band for twelve years."

"No offence, but I don't think a flute is gonna save America," Ringo furrowed her eyebrows, failing to draw the connection.

"What I *mean*," Robin emphasised, "is that my ears are little geniuses. It's your turn to sling ice-cream, my turn to translate. I don't even want credit I'm just bored."

"Ugh, fine," Steve groaned, ripping the scooper out of her hand and replacing it with the recorder. "But if I have to be out there, so do you, Ringo."

"*What?*" She whined, throwing her hands up in dismay as Steve dragged her chair backwards and gestured for her to rise.

"Up and at 'em, I'll even fetch you a hat."

"Put that hat on my head and I'll remove yours from your neck," Ringo grumbled in threat, trailing after her boyfriend and leaving the translation up to Robin, Jessica and Dustin. She never thought that she'd actually miss the drole voice of the Russian speaker, until she was getting yelled at for giving someone's daughter a blue spoon and not a pink one.

"But you asked for Rocky Road," Ringo narrowed her eyes at a teenager over the counter, who had returned to the till with the complaint that their tub of ice-cream had marshmallows mixed in. "Rocky Road has marshmallows."

"Okay, well I didn't realise that," the brunette shrugged, "and I'm allergic to marshmallows. So I want it exchanged for strawberry."

"So you weren't allergic when you looked through the display and saw marshmallows on top of it?" Her voice became increasingly strained, two hours of working in the ice-cream parlour had reduced her to an angry, angry person who saw red everywhere she looked. Something about the mall had been sending customers cuckoo, for she had never dealt with such rudeness back in the corner store.

"I didn't see them clearly, that's a real health hazard actually," the girl - who Ringo had known from school to be named Rebecca, continued with a sneer.

"So you weren't allergic to all the other marshmallows when you ate that entire tub before coming up to try and get a free refill?"

"Are you going to change it or not?"

"No! Now get out before I come around to the other side of this counter!" Ringo snapped, her patience having worn thin enough to break. Offended, Rebecca scoffed before storming out of the store with footsteps heavy enough to break iron. Only having overheard the final exchange, Steve snapped his head towards his girlfriend with widened eyes.

"Jesus, Ringo! This is my job, you're gonna get me fired!"

"I'd be doing you a favour," she ranted in return, the mini-argument cutting off by the window to the kitchen opening from behind and Robin's face appearing in the new space.

"We got our first sentence!" She exclaimed happily, distracting them from their bitter moods almost immediately. "*The week is long.*"

"Well that's thrilling," Steve deadpanned.

"Seriously? No 'let's get these pie-eating fuckers, Yuri?'" Ringo asked, feeling a wash of disappointment at the translation.

"That is way too many stereotypes rolled into one sentence," Jessica scoffed.

"I know, but it's progress!" Robin grinned excitedly, closing the window again and leaving the couple to return to the much more

mundane task of feeding the populace of Hawkins with dairy badness. The mood was positively dire, until two new customers waltzed through the entrance that left Ringo beaming with relief.

"Max! Sunny! Jane!" She held her arms out wide in greeting. "You have come to rescue me!"

"We've actually come to remind El here that men aren't shit," Max winked, hooking her elbow around the other girl's nearest one.

"True that," Ringo nodded, snickering when Steve dramatically flung himself backward as if the words had shot him like a bullet.

"I've never even had a boyfriend, but all day I've been pretending I dated a guy in a foster home before so I can fit in," Sunny voiced, shrugging carelessly while her companions looked over in shock.

"Wait, so Vinny never existed? And you never keyed his car because he cheated on you?" El adorably gasped in question, having fully believed the tale all day.

"No," the dark haired girl revealed, "but it definitely happened to somebody else on TV."

As Steve fetched their orders, the girls took the time to catch Ringo up on what had been happening in El's love life. Never did she think that she would be taking the side of her cousin's girlfriend, but the blonde had to admit that Mike was being incredibly rude to the girl - who was too emotionally immature to handle being toyed with. The next family dinner would surely be awkward after the grilling she could already envision happening.

"Wait a second," Steve paused after handing the girls their cones of choice, "are you even allowed to be here?" The thought had never crossed Ringo's mind that Hopper would never have knowingly let his supernatural daughter run rampant through Starcourt Mall, much less without him, but judging by her excited giggling and constant smile - she decided it couldn't have been a bad thing.

The image of them sprinting back through the entrance to escape only solidified the notion they were definitely breaking some rules.

"Did you really mean 'men are trash'?" Steve pouted from beside her, now that the rush of customers had calmed down and they could find a moment to talk.

"Steve, I told you I was sick and you kissed me so you could get sick too and then we'd die of a runny nose together," Ringo blushed at the thought, as cringy as it was it truly was one of the highlights of their relationship laying in his bed for a week - surrounded by a mound of tissues and watching re-runs of Starsky and Hutch, "I obviously didn't mean you."

When the time finally came for the store to close, Ringo had a newfound sympathy for Steve and Robin. Sure, her ex-manager had given her hell. But working with customers that ordered food was seemingly never-ending turmoil, at least her boss had occasionally taken a break.

"Tonight's my last night in the late slot, thank God," Ringo sighed, leaning her forehead against Steve's chest as he wrapped his arms around her. Their public displays of affection weren't all so public with the shutters closed, but the trio in the back room had chosen that moment to make a reappearance.

"Hey," Jessica called out through the opening window, "we think we've got most of it down. Care to join us or do you need to do your daily 'staring romantically into each other's eyes' ritual?"

"We're coming," Ringo announced with an eye roll, much to Steve's chagrin as he was dragged along behind her.

"If we had five minutes alone we wouldn't be doing that, that's for damn sure," he chuckled in a whisper into her ear, leaving the hair on her neck standing and her cheeks gaining a tinge of red.

To give credit where it was due, Robin and Jessica truly has outdone themselves in managing to translate the script in a few hours - in a language neither of them were familiar with. The translated sentences were written nearly across the board - Jessica's hand, without doubt. Although despite the achievement, Ringo couldn't help but feel a little deflated at the lack of entertainment the

sentences provided. For a moment, she had felt the mildest rush of adrenaline much akin to how she felt the previous Halloween. It had all amounted to nothing more than gibberish.

"The week is long, the silver cat feeds when blue meets yellow in the West," she read aloud, pouting her lips afterward and meeting Steve's eye. He was just as disappointed, she could tell.

"It has to be a code for something," Jessica speculated, defensive of the work they had done in translating when the validity of the sentences had come into question.

"It just can't be right! Codes come in like... those dots and shit," Steve ranted as he closed down the shutters, the last store open in the entire mall.

"It's *right*," Robin called back.

"I, personally, this this is great news," Dustin intervened, not at all phased by the dead end they had travelled down to.

"How is this great news?! So much for American heroes, it's total nonsense."

"It's not nonsense it's a super secret spy code, obviously."

"That's ridiculous."

"There are stranger things that have happened in this town than a Russian invasion," Jessica shrugged, freezing mid-step when she felt eyes burning into the side of her face - more specifically those of Dustin Henderson's.

"Like what?" Robin scoffed, although her eyes narrowed in suspicion at Jessica's sudden nervousness.

"Just like- I-I mean..."

"She means-" Ringo interrupted, in a desperate attempt to save her friend and to keep the events of last year and the year before a secret. "She just means... that another lesbian walks among us! We really did think Jessica was a lone wolf!"

Judging by the redness of Robin's face and the clenching of Jessica's fists - explaining the parallel universe and the monsters that had slipped from it would have been easier.

"Anyway," Robin coughed to clear her throat, "if it's a secret Russian transmission it would have to be obscure, what did you think they'd say 'fire the warhead at noon?' Why would anyone chat like that unless they were trying to hide the true meaning of their message? And why hide it unless it was somehow sensitive?"

"Exactly!" Dustin piped in. "Evil Russians."

"I can't believe I'm about to agree with this strange child, but yeah Evil Russians."

While Jessica, Robin and Dustin began to speculate on what the sentences could be hiding, Ringo had lingered behind when she noticed her boyfriend had stopped at a nearby lone carnival horse ride.

"You got a quarter?" He held out his hand in demand, while the blonde dissolved into giggles.

"You're a little old aren't you?" She cocked an eyebrow, but handed the money over nonetheless as he quickly slid the coin into the slot with practically maniacal eyes.

"I don't think boys can go on that after their balls drop," Jessica called out as their group turned and rejoined them.

"Need help getting up, little Stevie?" Robin continued the teasing.

"Just shut up a minute!"

"Holy shit," Dustin gasped, seemingly catching onto what Steve was insinuating as he grappled for the recorder again in his backpack. "The music!"

"Maybe they have horses like this in Russia?"

"The Indiana Flyer? I don't think so," Steve shook his head, looking like he was in the full throes of an epiphany. "This recording didn't

come from Russia, it came from here."

Standing up straight and grabbing for the tape player from Dustin's hands, the group listened intently to make sure their ears were not deceiving them - it truly was the same tune once they were played alongside each other. A tense moment followed, where Steve met eyes with each of the group to gauge if their reaction was as shocked as his own. It was then that he noticed Ringo was no longer beside him.

Whirling around with narrowed eyes, Steve could only sigh at the sight of his girlfriend, sitting on top of the horse and rocking on it as if she were half her current age.

"Really, Ringo?" He deadpanned, placing his hands on his hips. Her feet touched the ground the entire time, but it didn't stop the blonde.

"I spent a quarter on this damn thing, I'm at least going to get my money's worth," she ranted back at him, stubbornly sitting on the painted horse for the remainder of the minute.

"... and that was *She's a Rainbow* by the Rolling Stones, have you noticed I've been playing calmer songs as the night rages on to send you burnouts to sleep?" Ringo chuckled into the microphone, catching Ben's eye as he tiredly lolled his head against the back of the couch. "The next song will be the last played tonight, and the last played in the original Radio Ringo hours. Folks, it's been a pleasure talking crap every night for all the insomniacs out there, but I'm freakin' tired and Radio Ringo will now officially air from the respectable hour of 6pm to 7pm. As much as it physically pains me to do it, I've finally decided to listen to the people. Here is... ugh, here's *Come Together* by the Beatles."

"I can't believe they finally got you to play the Beatles," Ben barked a laugh as she removed her headphones and slid the switch to cut off her microphone feed. "I bet your mom thought she was doing you a favour naming you Ringo."

"I don't even like their music that much," she sighed, rolling her eyes at the familiar look of incredulity she was thrown after once again

admitting her pet peeve. Nights at the radio station had always gone so much quicker when someone was by her side, and Ben had wanted to try the graveyard shift out now that he didn't have a job to get some sleep for.

"You're an abomination, seriously," he deadpanned, before breaking his blank expression into a smile, secretly worrying his words would offend her and she wouldn't catch the joke. Not only had Ben not had enough friends through his life to be able to pick up on social cues - he was well aware he was painfully awkward - but he certainly didn't have friends that were *girls*.

"At least I'll finally be able to be a fully-rested abomination," she mumbled as her fingers rubbed the exhaustion from her eyes, then proceeding to switch off all the equipment and lights as Ben accompanied her to the parking lot. Another reason she was happy to have someone during her shows? Being outside at 3am was deathly terrifying, especially in a town as eerie as Hawkins.

Ben had offered to walk her over to her car, even though his was parked on the far side of the building and completely out of sight of her own - but stubbornness prevailed, and the blonde insisted she would be okay to walk to her Beetle. He had done enough for her over the span of a week, the least she could do was let him go home sooner.

"Are you going to be okay traveling home?" He inquired politely, rustling into his jean pockets for the keys. Ringo suspected that Ben was no stranger to financial struggles as she was, and tended to fret lately that his abrupt resignation from Charlie's Corner Store would spell trouble for him.

"Of course, I am! Are you? If you're too tired I can drive you."

"Nah, I've heard rumours about your driving - no offence!" He grimaced, leaving her to roll her eyes but smirk in amusement nonetheless as they parted ways toward their respective vehicles. A spooky fog had settled through the night air, and it was much colder than a Summer night should have been. Ringo had seen enough horror movies to know there was a 99% chance a masked serial killer was about to make her the first victim. Shame, it was always the

blondes that died first.

Breathing an exhale of relief once she was safely behind the wheel, Ringo made sure to cast her head back to look in the backseat - one could never be too sure when it came to the likes of Jason Voorhees. Thankfully, the coast was clear for Ringo - but across the parking lot, paranoia had reached her friend also.

Where Ringo had been thinking of *Friday the 13th*, Ben had considered *Halloween* a more likely scenario and practically jogged across the emptied lot to get to his car. Much like his blonde companion, he too had exhaled in relief when he had made it inside the cold car - immediately slipping the key in to turn on the heater.

"What the hell?" He muttered to himself as the sound of an engine sputtering followed the turn of his key. Multiple times he had tried to start the engine, and all had failed until eventually the engine didn't make any sound at all when he tried it. Darting his head up to check if Ringo had already left, an audible gasp slipped from his lips at the sight of a figure standing a few meters in front of the car.

Ben recognised him. Of course he did - everyone knew who Billy Hargrove was. The boy had made wavelengths at school since arriving the previous year. Ben had managed to stay out of his way until now, knowing him to be a loose canon that would lash out if tested. Billy was a bully, but he had never had a problem with Ben - until now, seemingly.

Swallowing thickly, Ben kept his eyes staring forward, waiting for something to happen. Perhaps he was unjustly nervous, maybe Hargrove only wanted to help with his car. But upon closer inspection, it wouldn't be far-fetched to say he was drunk, or high - or even both. A thick sheen of sweat left a shine on Billy's skin that could be seen even through the darkness, his normally unkempt hair even more matted and damp than usual. More than his physical appearance, the sheer look of pure and utter *hatred* upon his face would have sent birds fleeing, mice scampering and babies wailing.

To his horror, the older teenager began to tread heavy footsteps towards Ben's car, meaning in his step and a terrifying set to his shoulders. With shaking fingers, Ben reached for the locks on his

doors and violently shoved them down - choking in fright when the lock rose right back up again, as if someone had slipped the keys into his lock and turned them up once again.

The closer Billy stepped, the more frantic Ben grew - desperately searching for anything that could stop what would surely be some form of a confrontation, every hair on his neck told him so.

As if sent by God, the screech of wheels against asphalt interrupted the deathly silence of the parking lot - originating from a yellow Volkswagen that stopped mere centimetres from Billy's right leg. Ben had never been so glad to see Ringo Wheeler in his life.

Gritting her teeth as she stared at the boy in front of the hood of her car, images swirled in Ringo's mind of the previous Halloween - when she had lifted a lamp and knocked Billy out cold. Much like then, he held the same violent glint in his eye, the same blood thirst on the set of his lips.

And as she waved towards her friend without breaking eyes from Billy for Ben to join her in her own fully functional vehicle, Ringo couldn't help but wonder if one day she wouldn't press down on the brakes.

Ended this on a dark note but I just wanna say I have set my own standards for relationships so high after writing Steve and Ringo I'm gonna be sinGLE FOREVER.

NicoleR85 - Thank you! I'm so glad you like it so far I hope you like this one too x

DeathDoUsPart - and I love you for loving Ringo!

TacoPhoenix88 - I really enjoy writing the other OCs like Sunny, Jessica, Julia and Ben so I'm glad you like reading them because I know some people just want some romance and that's it! Even if Robin hadn't come out as lesbian I literally planned for her to be lesbian in this book anyway and then season 3 came out and I was like OH WELL ALRIGHT THEN! What I love writing about Jessica and Robin is that it's not the same story seen a thousand times, if

you get me? I'm bisexual myself, and maybe it's just me but I'm tired of all queer fictional relationships being like "oh we shouldn't! am I gay? no! okay yes I am!" like I just want a queer couple to kill zombies or some shit without making it such a big deal, even though those stories are of course important as well. So Jessica and Robin I feel represent the everyday normal queer friends that I know that just struggle texting first ahahah. Thanks for reading I always look forward to hearing your opinions!

Cashy7183980 - Thank you! Hope you like this chapter and have a lovely day x

Chloe - that's so much reading holy hell I can't believe that, thank you! I'm sure there are books better than mine but if you enjoyed it that's all that matters! 3

Crackers - Ben and steve out here making me dry the bar HIGH

firstofhername - oh no hahah! At least you seen it eventually, I haven't updated in about three weeks purely because I'm trying to get on track but I'd never discontinue this book!

9. Feeding Silver Cats

"**SHOULD WE CHANGE OUR CLOTHES?**" Was the first sentence Ringo Wheeler heard upon entering *Scoops* the next morning, only to find her new band of detective misfits huddled around the table in the back room staring down at a variety of equipment - ranging from a tape recorder to binoculars.

"Why would we change our clothes, Steve?" Robin enquired dryly, excited to hear what he would possibly come out with next.

"If we're in black no one will see us," he shrugged, nodding down to his extremely visible striped shirt.

"Wait," Jessica interrupted, adopting a look of absolute shock as she started to stare down at the skin on her arms that was exposed. "You guys can't see me?"

Robin chuckled at her lame joke, playfully shoving her by the shoulder in a very *non*-Robin way. Ringo and Steve would have classified their newest friend as someone that was very mature - seemingly years older than the two of them instead of one younger. But she was suddenly acting like an inexperienced pre-teen, unsure of themselves and trying to impress.

"What are you doing? Because I'm not down with doing black face," Ringo voiced with a weary expression, setting the backpack she was instructed to bring down onto the table and relieving her shoulder of the extra weight. Immediately upon doing so, Dustin dived for the bag and heaved it into his lap, haphazardly flinging the contents across the table.

"Hey!" She protested as he carelessly tossed a flashlight, her now infamous Walkman, an emergency whistle Steve had begged her to bring and a spare bottle of water. Growing frustrated with the objects she brought and their lack of function, Dustin grunted in annoyance - barely realising what he was picking up next until Ringo was gasping and he happened to notice the bright pink colour of the cylinder-shaped object between his fingers.

"Oh my god!" Dustin bellowed, firing the tampon across the table as if it burned to the touch. "I touched it! I can't believe I just touched that- oh my god!"

"It's unused! And in the wrapper!" Ringo began to shout, cheeks burning a bright red as Steve clapped a hand over his mouth to withhold his laughter at his friend's completely exaggerated overreaction. The younger boy was now viciously wiping his hands against his shirt and gagging profusely, leading to Ringo eventually smacking her hand up the side of his head to bring him out of his hysteria.

"It doesn't matter if it's not used! I know its *intended* use!"

"You know what," Robin huffed, growing tired of his antics. "Why don't you both take Dustin here for your little detective work, while Jessica and I man the ice-cream?"

"How did I get dragged into this?" Ringo scoffed, shoving all of the castaway items back into her backpack after breathing a sigh of relief at the distraction.

"Hey, come on!" Steve intervened, tugging on her sleeve in an attempt to drag her away for the plan he had carefully laid out in his mind. "You're going to be the distraction!"

"The *what* now?" She demanded, tearing her arm from his grip to no avail - as he simply stepped behind her and began to push her toward the door with his hands firmly gripped onto her shoulders.

"You know! Like in the movies where the hot girl distracts the bad guys so the others can slip inside?"

"Oh no," Jessica whistled at his statement, grimacing at the flash of fury that spread across her best friend's face.

Steve Harrington, despite having had a serious relationship for the better part of eight months, still had a lot to learn about women. Especially women whose last name was 'Wheeler'.

"I am not just a distraction, Steve Harrington! I'm the main goddamn attraction! And if anyone is shaking their ass for the good of the

team, then you'd better have worn loose pants, mister!"

Their long-awaited 'detective work' didn't amount to much booty-shaking after all, the trio soon came to realise. In fact, their secret mission didn't amount to much more than lurking like weirdos in tall plants randomly decorating the vast spaces of Starcourt mall. Ringo was growing increasingly tired of the work, which was a lot more boring than one would think - and after the previous night's parking lot fright, her lack of sleep was beginning to catch up on her.

Ben had been more than a little shaken up when the blonde had finally drove him home to safety, thanking her profusely for managing to notice the scene and step in before anything could have happened. Sure, herself and Billy had their differences in the past - if differences included knocking the other person out with blunt force lamp trauma, that was. But Hargrove had never struck Ringo as the type of guy to randomly lurk on those on by themselves in empty parking lots - at three in the morning, no less. Whatever had struck Ben about Billy's appearance was enough to leave her wide awake for the duration of the night, too fearful to fall asleep without waking up with a jolt.

"What do evil Russians look like, anyway?" Steve's voice broke her from her daze, as he held the binoculars up to his eyes in an almost comical manner and randomly trailed his eyeline across the mall's customers.

"Tall, blonde, angry," Dustin guessed, leaning back to see past Steve so he could drop his left eye in a cheeky wink at their female companion. "Basically Ringo with an accent."

"Keep talking," she threatened, forcing a smile that ended up looking somewhat terrifying, "you're gonna need that tampon for your bloody nose."

After a further five minutes of people-watching, that felt more like five hours with how boring the inhabitants of Hawkins could be even in a new and trendy mall, Ringo finally stood up with a huff and the promise of fetching each of them a slushie. As she crossed the food court the trio had been positioned in front of, Steve found the view of his binoculars shifting down to follow the image of his girlfriend.

"Man," he sighed happily, chest filling with the fullness it usually did when he took a moment to appreciate the woman, "Ringo really is too good for me. Do you think she's too good for me?"

"Definitely," Dustin agreed, roughly reaching to rip the binoculars from Steve's hands out of frustration for his lack of focus, "why are you looking at her? Like, hello! Super secret spy mission!"

"You're right," he nodded before continuing as if he hadn't heard past Dustin's first point, "like- I should probably do something right? To remind her that I love her before she ends up seeing I'm a dirtbag and leaving me for some douchebag named Brian that ties the sleeves of his sweater around his neck?"

"Or some cool guy named Dustin that saved the world once or twice," the boy shrugged, fighting off the teasing smirk that threatened to rise on his lips.

"You didn't do shit, *I* saved the world once or twice."

"No you screamed like a bitch and got your ass beat up, but don't worry. I'm not going to take your girlfriend, I have Suzie."

"First of all you can't *take* her, she's a person not my lunch money," Steve rolled his eyes, flopping down to rest on his knees to relieve the cramps rising in his thighs from crouching. "And second of all - Suzie, right? 'Hotter than Phoebe Cates', Suzie? And how did you get her again? Oh yeah, my advice. Because that's how this works, I give the advice and you listen."

Choosing to stay silent before harsher words were said, and because he genuinely couldn't think of a good enough comeback at that point in time, Dustin pursed his lips and stared back through the view of his binoculars once more to find the object of their discussion trailing back to their hiding spot with three slushies somehow tucked against the other in her small hands.

Just as Steve had sprinted past Robin, so did she but in the opposite direction as he re-entered *Scoops* in a mad dash. Dustin followed sullenly behind, equal parts disappointed by their lack of evidence to

frustrated that Steve was halting their mission for a full hour. Without anyone questioning Robin's mad dash, he proceeded forward until he was safely behind the counter once more and most importantly - within reach of the radio. The clock was striking six o'clock, and he wasn't going to miss the latest installment of Radio Ringo now that it was aired at a feasible time.

"I wonder what's up with Rob-" Jessica began, only to be silenced by a shout of 'zip it' from Steve's mouth as he cranked the volume louder until Ringo's voice filled the entire ice-cream parlour.

"Seriously, you seen her an hour ago," Dustin deadpanned, stealing a plastic spoon and dipping it into one of the containers of ice-cream.

"It's not that I miss her it's her first show at this time, plus I'm hoping she'll namedrop me," Steve shrugged with a playful smirk, leaning back against the wall once her voice cut off and a song began to play.

"I cracked it!" Robin exclaimed, appearing suddenly in the doorway looking like a kid on Christmas morning before launching into the conclusion she had come to on the translations. Glancing between each other with incredulous glances, the opposing three individuals made a grab for the landline the manager of *Scoops* regularly used to call in to check on his staff. Laughing with glee as she managed to snap it up first before the other two, Jessica began to dial the number that Ringo was in the process of reading out across the airwaves.

Across town, the presenter herself was sighing with exasperation. Her radio show had been at its highest listening rate ever - but it was already tiresome rejecting the endless Beatle-centric questions that inevitably arose with the mention of her name. She almost groaned into the microphone at the signal of another call, hesitantly flipping the switch that would connect their voice.

"You're live on Radio Ringo," she droned - trying to sound upbeat, "please do not swear and please do not fucking ask me to play *Here Comes the Sun*."

"Hi!" Jessica rang out immediately, the blonde picking up on the familiarity of her voice. "My name's Jessica, and I'd like you to dedicate *Every Little Thing She Does is Magic* by the Police to my friend

Robin for being so kind and feeding that *silver cat* of mine."

"I-" Ringo paused, brain spinning as she tried to decipher the obviously encrypted message before eventually coming to a single conclusion, "so... Robin fed your pussy?"

"I told you she wouldn't get it!" Steve could unmistakably be heard in the background over the gritting of Jessica's teeth.

"You know what?" She huffed. "Just play the damn song, we'll tell you later."

Still baffled by the interaction, Ringo proceeded to find the correct record to play the requested song while the next in queue played in the background. Over and over in her mind she repeated her friend's words - feeling as if she was missing something incredibly obvious. Until her wandering fingers swept over the vinyl cover of the album, and it finally clicked.

"Oh my god!" She hissed to herself in shock, anxiously looking towards the clock and silently begging time to move faster so she could return to the mall for a debrief on what exactly Robin had come to decipher.

Ringo was more than confused when her car chugged into the near-empty parking lot, the usually bright lights of the vast mall now dimmed to darkness as a sign of its obvious closing. Nowhere in her line of sight through the harsh rain was she able to make out a car even remotely resembling Steve's. Cursing her boyfriend for having left the mall without waiting or at least telling her, the blonde prepared to reverse out from the parking space her yellow bug had been parked into when a hand smacking against the window startled her enough to elicit a small scream.

Now the Wheeler daughter didn't even remotely blame Steve Harrington for being unaware of the events that had transpired the previous night that would have left her on edge - but she most certainly believed he fully deserved the nip she delivered to the skin on the back of his arm the second she was out of her car and within reach.

"Ow!" He yelled, reaching up to grab his bicep. "What was that for?"

"For messing with me! I've still got the axe in the car, be thankful it was my fingernails!" She shouted in return, tugging her raincoat up her arms and its hood over her head to protect herself from the unrelenting rain that left the ends of her hair damp in the second it took to retaliate.

"Come on, I'll explain on the way!" He called through the stormy weather, his soaked hand reaching for her own and his other gesturing for her to lay low as they began to tread quickly through the emptied lot towards the loading docks on the far side of the building.

Steve's 'explaining' had amounted to nothing other than a breathless exhale of words that almost formed one word in entirety, instead of a sentence.

"The Russians are in the mall-" he panted when they finally reached the others, who were positioned on the roof and drinking in the full view of stock being transported through the loading bays.

"Stop pushing in the hall?" She repeated, expression twisted as she tried to understand his muffled speech.

"No," Dustin huffed, needing all hands on deck to spy on the scene before them. And if Steve and Ringo were wasting time talking, they sure as hell weren't focusing. "The Russians - they're in the *mall*. The translations were talking about a delivery haul coming in at 8.45 pm, Eastern Time."

"You got all that from a cat eating and how a trip to China sounds good?" Ringo's eyes were wide, potentially being mistaken for mocking when she was in fact impressed.

"Focus, dingbat!" Jessica shoved him by the shoulder, tearing the binoculars from his grip and refocusing them on the scene below.

"Look for Imperial Panda and Kaufman Shoes," Robin instructed. A sudden burst of adrenaline had overtaken the group - the thrill of doing something they were aware they shouldn't have been.

Something exciting.

Besides, Ringo fancied her chances with a squad of Russians over a single Demogorgan any day.

"There!" Jessica called out, dragging their attentions back from their pulsing blood and racing heartbeats. "The whistling guy. He's wearing a yellow raincoat and shorts, and by god I'll never understand what was going through his mind."

"What do you think is in there?" Steve dared to put words to the question on everyone's lips.

"Guns, bombs?" Dustin suggested in a horrified tone, while Robin simultaneously offered up "chemical weapons".

"How about... shoes and Chinese food?" Ringo scoffed, ever the disbelieving one in their group. Sure, Jessica had been right when she said that stranger things had happened in Hawkins than a Soviet invasion, but the fact that those things had ever happened in a town as dull as this was a miracle in and of itself. Well, as much of a miracle as a deadly monster that murdered multiple people could be.

"Shoes and Chinese food?" Steve echoed with a deadpan glance over toward his girlfriend. "They're armed to the teeth!"

"What? You've never threatened to shoot someone over a dumpling?"

By this point, Dustin had physically wrestled the binoculars from Jessica's firm grip - eager to get a close look for himself - but the enhanced view wasn't allowing him to see any more than his companions could, as the doors opened to unveil another series of boxes much like the ones being currently carried inside. Although the desperation to see for himself had taken its toll on Steve - who reminded the others that he hadn't yet got his turn at the spyware.

"No!" Dustin protested, wrangling with Steve as they both held tight onto either side of the glasses. The scuffle elicited an intense eye roll from the three women present, but their expressions of annoyance soon fell to one of horror as the fight led to the hitting of the binoculars against a nearby metal pole - leaving a ringing bang that

echoed from the rooftop, even audible through the rain.

Gasping almost as loud, the gang all but threw themselves down to the damp ground in a desperate attempt to get out of sight - but it was futile. The guards had already been tense before the commotion, and their ruckus had only alerted their suspicions further. Sneaking a peak over the wall, Steve cursed to see the duo disperse, with one likely having the intention to locate the source of the noise.

"Ringo, now is your chance to shine!" Steve whispered in a rush, staring toward her with frantically wide eyes. "Go seduce him!"

"Seduce him?" She repeated in a whisper-shout. "He's got a *gun*, you fuckin' pimp!"

"Girl, I love you but not enough to die together," Jessica added, nodding towards the advancing foreigner. "Perk your tits up and do women everywhere proud."

"Wow, so much for the feminist movement," Ringo drily responded, giving her boyfriend and friend the stink-eye.

"Everyone!" Robin commanded, taking charge of the situation and pushing them all to scurry backward. "Back to base!" Her firm tone and sudden military stance left Ringo wondering if she would also smack their behinds one by one on the way inside, where they sprinted through the staff hallways en route to *Scoops*.

"Did that seriously just happen?" Dustin wheezed the second they reached the sanctuary that was the *Scoops Ahoy* back room. Everyone's breathing was ragged as they tried to calm themselves from both the fear of being chased by a gunman and running in general. Ripping open her backpack, Ringo began to pass around the bottles of water - giving Dustin a pointed look for earlier dragging her choice of items.

"Why would they need guns to defend a shipment of shoes and Chinese food?" Steve questioned, directing it toward Ringo in response to her earlier disbelief.

"Oh that was a gunman? I thought it was a *bus* by the way you nearly threw me under him!" She ranted in return, only half-heartedly. Despite his suggestions, Steve would never have allowed his girlfriend anywhere near the dangerous men that could threaten her life.

"Something's obviously going on, though," Jessica agreed, lounging against the wall and running her hands through her hair - which had become rather bushy from the rain and running.

"We need to get in there!" Dustin exclaimed, grappling the banana out of Ringo's backpack and receiving a glare as a result as he broke it open to eat. "*What?* If I'm gonna fight the Soviet Union I need *potassium*, Ringo."

"We'll investigate more tomorrow," Robin concluded, "but you're right - we need in there."

"Have I stepped through the freakin' Looking Glass here?" Steve scoffed, "guns! Terrorists! This isn't looking for buried treasure, we should just call the police!"

"If we could just see what was in the boxes we could call in the SWAT teams, the army, the navy- the whole thing!" Dustin pleaded, tossing the peeled banana skin into the trash can.

"I'm sure the navy might struggle bringing their ships inland, Dustin," Ringo snickered.

"Look," Jessica interrupted. "I joined this crap because I'm bored and I've spent most of my summer feeding my little brother tinned spaghetti. But now there might actually be something to this, we can't walk away."

"God," Ringo groaned, dragging her hands over her face as the couple finally relented to investigating further. Trouble did always seem to find the duo.

Hoping to get back into more regular updates now that I've given myself an update timetable, thanks everyone for being so patient! I

hope you enjoy the chapter and what's to come!

NicoleR85 - an update! Hope you like it! x

Judging All Day Every Day - everyone thought Ben was about to get the cut, he's too precious to become one of Billy's minions! There was a bit of foreshadowing I'm not sure people picked up on though! Ringo is my personality goals if I could be that funny I'd be happy for life

Vince Basile Jr - So happy you said that thank you! And thank you for always being so supportive! x

TacoPhoenix88 - I can't believe how quickly people have come to like Ben's character it's so nice to see, I didn't expect it at all! Yeahhh Mike and El's relationship in season 3 didn't seem right to me, she was just too innocent to have a boyfriend just yet in my opinion! Thanks so much, I always look forward to reading your comments and this one was as flattering as ever!

ReidsLittleGenius213 - The bar has been SET. No longer accepting romantic partners who are not Steve, Ringo or Jessica and I 10/10 will stay single forever. Thank you! Hope you enjoy this one!